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THE ART OF WRITING ENGLISH

A Book for College Classes

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AMERICAN BOOK COMPANY

NEW YORK CINCINNATI CHICAGO

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ART OF WRITING ENGLISH.
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PREFACE

THIS book is the outgrowth of two convictions. The first of these is that greater emphasis ought to be placed upon the fact that writing is not merely self-expression, but communication; in other words, that composition must be regarded chiefly as "a double-ended process" in which the writer is successful only when he has produced the desired effect upon his audience. The second is that this communication through writing is an art, and must be studied very much as other arts are studied.

The authors have endeavored, first of all, to show the student that writing is a normal kind of activity. They have, therefore, thought it necessary to do more than state a few well-established principles and discuss the rhetorical forms of composition, important as these matters are. As may be observed in the introductory chapter, they believe that the student should early come into the learner's frame of mind by seeing the advantage of being able to write well. They are convinced, moreover, that when the student is once ready to learn, the teacher ought to help him find material in which he can have genuine interest, to guide him in making his vocabulary more serviceable, to show him what the actual processes of composing are, and to suggest means of testing the effectiveness of what he does. Unless the student can be brought in some such manner to feel that his work is a very natural kind of thing to do, he is likely to look upon all writing, as well as every course in composition, as something mechanical and quite removed from his life — as "a thing apart."

The authors hold two or three other opinions about method of presentation. They believe it is a grave educational error to teach composition as if every attempt at writing were an effort to produce literature. On the other hand, they believe it is no

less a fault to teach the subject as if writing were never anything more than a means of reporting sales or securing larger orders for goods. It seems to them that a proper balance in the character of the student's work in an elementary course can be maintained best only when the two kinds of writing, — that which is an artistic end in itself, and that which serves the purposes of everyday life, — are considered side by side. Throughout the book, therefore, they have observed the division of all writing into æsthetic and instrumental, and have sought to show the student how the two very different purposes implied in these terms make necessary two standards of effectiveness. The second opinion is concerning argumentation. They have thought it absolutely essential to treat this subject as if it were in truth mainly a form of composition, and not oral debate. There seems to be little more reason for attempting, in a book on writing, to restrict the whole field of argument to its one most rigid and all in all least usable form, than for dealing with exposition as if it were used solely as a means of making exegetical sermons. They have endeavored, too, to give informal argument at least a part of the consideration it deserves.

Any intention of trying to write either a series of pleasant essays for vacation reading or a body of condensed directions for ready reference is hereby disclaimed. The authors are glad to admit that they have tried to make the treatment of their subject fresh and simple enough to enable the layman to read the book with a degree of ease and with profit. They have, however, written primarily for the classroom ; and they have assumed that the teacher would in many instances desire to illustrate and amplify according to the needs of individual students. Although the text may possibly have some value as it stands alone, the authors wish to insist that its real significance becomes evident only when it accompanies regular practice in composition and in criticism. They are firm believers in Carlyle's " Properly thou hast no other knowledge but what thou hast got by working." The following chapters aim only to give fundamental suggestions about " working " ; their function is not to serve as a system of arbitrary guideposts, but rather as a vantage point from which

the student can choose his own way intelligently. It scarcely need be said that the book presupposes the very necessary drill in elementary details.

Thanks are gratefully extended to Professor J. S. Kenyon, of Butler College; Professor C. W. Park, of the University of Cincinnati; Professor Roderick Scott, of Earlham College; Professor P. D. Sherman, of Oberlin College; and Mr. Meredith Nicholson, for reading parts of the manuscript; to Mr. H. W. O'Connor, Mrs. Mabel Bonnell Barnes, and Mr. D. L. Clark, for valuable suggestions and substantial assistance of many kinds; to several of the authors' students for illustrative matter, especially to Mr. Phil Clugston for the brief and the parts of the completed argument used in Chapter VIII; and to a half hundred professional writers for the information they cheerfully contributed about their methods of work. All other conscious obligations are acknowledged in the text or the footnotes.

The selections from T. B. Aldrich, Arlo Bates, John Burroughs, S. M. Crothers, R. W. Emerson, B. Harte, G. L. Kittredge, J. R. Lowell, B. Matthews, G. H. Palmer, Bliss Perry, E. A. Ross, and H. B. Stowe are used by permission of, and by special arrangement with, Houghton Mifflin Company. Grateful acknowledgment is made to The Century Company; Doubleday, Page, and Company; Harper and Brothers; Henry Holt and Company; John Lane Company; J. B. Lippincott Company; Longmans, Green, and Company; Macmillan Company; and Charles Scribner's Sons for permission to use copyrighted material; and to the publishers of *The Nation* and *The Outlook* for the use of extracts.

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PART ONE

THE ART OF WRITING ENGLISH

CHAPTER I — INTRODUCTION

I. THE FIELD OF COMPOSITION

Our success in learning to write will be determined very largely by the spirit in which we go about our work. This spirit, in turn, will depend in no small measure on the clearness with which we see how our ability to write is related to our immediate or remote well-being. If we attach no importance to good writing, we shall probably drudge through the hours of practice as a slave would, cursing fate because of our hard lot, and lamenting the labor wasted in a vain attempt to make useless progress. If, on the other hand, we write with the full assurance that unceasing practice will some time result advantageously, we shall find that learning to put thoughts on paper is not humdrum work and is not impossibly difficult. At the outset, then, let us ask ourselves how skill in composition, and the training designed to develop that skill, may contribute to a fuller life.

A. Composition a Kind of Communication

We shall find our question partly answered as soon as we reflect upon the essential character of writing. Writing is not a mysterious art that died with the Ancients, the Elizabethans, or the Victorians. Neither is it a magic skill that belongs exclusively to any specially favored class of people now living. Nor is it a mere educational device placed in the hands of teachers for the purpose of forcing students to compare their

own efforts with the masterpieces of a few literary giants whose fame is secure in the idealized past. Viewed rightly, it is only a very necessary means of communication which men have developed in order that they might be clearly and permanently understood on an endless variety of matters. Consequently, instead of being an activity in which only a few persons engage, or in which many of us engage only on exceptional occasions, it is one in which all of us must employ ourselves more or less habitually. A few who believe they have something to say which would be of much more than ordinary interest if said well, use writing for a special purpose; that is, they endeavor to write literature. An incomparably larger number of us use it only as an everyday tool; we employ it in writing letters, applying for positions, reporting investigations, recording transactions, or setting forth our opinions on public questions. Thus, whether our chief concern in life is to satisfy our own taste and that of other people by producing fine art in language, or whether it is merely to gain ordinary workaday comforts, we are confronted with the necessity of expressing ourselves in writing.

B. The Necessity of Mastering Composition

This necessity, felt in some degree since the times when men began to write, is made exceedingly pressing to-day. A thousand inventions and discoveries have brought society into closer organization than ever before. Things which in our daily lives we regard as too ordinary to have any wide significance, — the limited transcontinental trains, the trolley cars, the improved telegraph, the universally used telephone, rural mail delivery, and daily newspapers, — have drawn the world into such small compass that an entire continent is only a large neighborhood with all the intensity of neighborhood interests. At once we can see that such a condition necessarily brings about a more general and a more perfect diffusion of intelligence. Men and women in every corner of the country read daily about the

possible movements in politics for the next two or three years, the consolidation of railway systems, the prices of wheat and stocks and bonds, the progress of important legal contests, the work of Congress, the guests at the White House, the policy of our leading institutions of learning, the new books published, the prominent passengers on every arriving or departing ocean steamship, the newest fashions in dress, the serious losses of life and property, the number of hits and errors in the baseball games of the day before, and the latest feats in aviation. The quickened life which grows out of this wide range of interest creates new demands for greater skill of every kind.

As a part of this general demand, there is an insistent cry for more effective writing. People who in their wider and richer experience have learned that it is possible to have all things done well are weary of legislators who cannot write laws, of business correspondents who cannot write letters, and of friends who offend because through crudity they say what they do not mean. Perhaps in other days a man who was too indolent to give attention to his writing might have avoided the necessity; crude expression might have served him. But to-day, under the influence of our quickened civilization, a man can scarcely hope to become an important factor in society unless he can express himself with some degree of adequacy. People will not stop to listen to him if he cannot explain his wants clearly and without unnecessary hesitation ; and they will not do what he desires if he cannot convince them and move them to action. And if a man is unable to use his mother tongue accurately, he not only turns many away from him day by day because of his obvious habits of carelessness, but when a supreme opportunity comes, he is, through his lack of power, unable to reach a large part of his audience of readers. Unless he is content to be a third-rate lawyer, minister, business man, or scientist, and is willing to be forever classed as uneducated, he must be able to increase the value of his thoughts by expressing them skillfully.

II. CURRENT OBJECTIONS TO TRAINING IN COMPOSITION

Not always, however, do we agree upon the means to an end when we have agreed that the end is desirable. Thus students sometimes admit the importance of a mastery of composition, but allow little objections to keep them from the full benefit of training designed to lead to that mastery. Such objections should not take us far aside; yet, because they represent a condition of mind that should not be disregarded, we shall be better fitted to pursue our way if we determine whether they are well founded. They are not wholly unnatural in character, for it must be remembered that unless we are exceedingly conscientious, we almost invariably object to doing anything that may prove to be a little unpleasant or wearisome, or that does not promise immediate results. Consequently, when we come face to face with a course of study and practice which requires many weeks of patient labor, it is not altogether surprising that some of us wonder if there is not an easier way, or if there are not many good reasons why we should ignore every way proposed. With students who falter in the performance of difficult tasks, three or four of these objections have become traditional.

A. Impossible: Writing is wholly a Gift

The first of these is that writing is wholly a gift and therefore cannot be learned; that some persons write well without training, and that all others are doomed to failure even if they devote their entire lives to constant effort. Usually the champions of this objection dismiss the whole question by quoting with an air of finality the much-abused words, "Poets are born, not made." The quotation reveals their erroneous conception of writing and emphasizes the fact that the objection is based upon a false or a narrow definition. Writing, they would have us believe, embraces only the loftiest kind of literature, the very

rare kind that sometimes seems to transcend all human knowledge and all law. In other words, they assume that in matters of written expression only the higher, incommunicable power exists. In all other fields of creative work we know that both the incommunicable and the communicable are normally present. For example, the great architect, the one who plans buildings that are permanent monuments to his ability, possesses, we assume, the incommunicable power; yet there are many other excellent architects who do their work well not because of unusual native endowments, but because they have mastered their art and its craft through rigorous training and patient labor. The ability of the former may be necessary in designing a great cathedral, but the highly developed lesser power of the latter may render equally important service by planning attractive cottages, fireproof factories and office buildings, and comfortable apartment houses. In the field of composition there is a like division of ability. The highest, rarest kind of writing, we may believe, results only from a power that cannot be communicated; but most of it requires only reasonable and persistent intelligence.

As soon as we see that there are two kinds of creative power and that the more ordinary kind, the communicable, is valuable in doing a large part of the world's work, this objection loses its force. At once it seems surprising that an intelligent person should believe that the literary deities, through some irrevocable decree, had prevented him forever from exercising his intelligence in just one respect, — that of making himself understood. Yes, poets, — that is, great poets, — are born, not made; but as much may be said of great blacksmiths, great athletes, great engineers, great musicians, great sculptors, great architects. The highest ability of any sort is inborn. Nevertheless, most of the world's blacksmithing, most of its sport, most of its engineering, most of its music, most of its sculpture, and most of its architecture will always be the product of ability that is not unusual. If, then, we believe that our ability is very ordinary, this objection that writing is wholly a gift should not influence us away from painstaking effort.

Assuredly a course in writing will not make a man speak wisdom if he is not wise; neither will it make him say anything well when he has nothing to say. We cannot make a fifty horse-power engine pull a hundred horse-power load. But we can make it pull a fifty horse-power load. Many people who really have something to say have not mastered the English language well enough to gain a hearing. Every college student, unless he has already become skilled in expression, ought to be included in this class. If from daily contact with other students, with teachers, with books, and with the variety of life which usually surrounds a college community, he is not stimulated to say something which, if said well, would be of interest to somebody, he is scarcely qualified to pursue studies of any kind in a higher institution of learning. He ought to find it worth while to express himself accurately and interestingly, if he is full of nothing more than doubt and uncertainty. Any state of mind, any opinion sincerely held, let it be remembered, is interesting if it is presented faithfully.

But what of those who possess the unusual gift? Although the authors of this book are writing it primarily for the many who have only ordinary ability, it doubtless will fall into the hands of some who feel that they are especially favored. These may believe that since they write promisingly, systematic practice is unnecessary. Let us see what genius itself has said about the matter:

"This [constructive] ability is based, to be sure, in great part, upon the faculty of analysis, enabling the artist to get full view of the machinery of his proposed effect, and thus work it and regulate it at will; but a great deal depends upon properties strictly moral; for example, upon patience, upon concentrativeness, or the power of holding the attention steadily to one purpose, upon self-dependence and contempt for all opinion which is opinion and no more — in especial, upon energy and industry. So vitally important is this last, that it may be well doubted if anything to which we have been accustomed to give the title of a 'work of genius' was ever accomplished without it." [1]

[1] Poe, *Marginalia*.

From this expression of belief and the scores of others of which it is typical, we may safely assume that at least a large part of genius is aptitude for labor.

B. Unnecessary: Skill is gained Incidentally

Another objection is sometimes heard: the study of composition is unnecessary, since other college courses furnish the intellectual fiber which must be the foundation of all effective writing and provide many opportunities for incidental practice. The first part of this objection requires no answer, inasmuch as brain sinew may be as easily developed in a course of writing as in a course of any other kind. In answer to the second part, it should be said in the first place that the amount of writing required in other studies is comparatively small — too small to be of much value as training in composition. Even if the amount were large, its value would not be increased greatly, since the criticisms which teachers in other departments offer must be directed mainly to the subject-matter. Whenever they turn their chief attention to matters of expression, they defeat the real purpose of their own courses. It is undeniably true that every piece of writing which a student does as a part of any college requirement ought to be criticized as English by the teacher directly concerned; but there should be an opportunity for the student to practice writing and have it criticized primarily, and not incidentally, as expression. We should devote some time to the mastery of technique, in order that when we write solely for the purpose of instructing or interesting or convincing others, we may give our time freely to the subject in hand, with only incidental thought about form. "In your own art, bow your head over technique. Think of technique when you rise and when you go to bed. Forget purpose in the meanwhile; get to love technical processes; to glory in technical successes; get to see the world entirely through technical spectacles, to see it in terms of what you can do.

Then when you have anything to say, the language will be apt and copious." [1]

Perhaps a word should be added about the relation between reading literature and writing. Sometimes we are told that if we thoroughly saturate ourselves with the writings of others, we thereby learn how to write without submitting to the pains of systematic practice. This view touches the imagination pleasantly, but overestimates the influence of reading. Literature is a powerful ally of composition, but it is not a substitute for it. When we are practicing in our own way, the influence of the movement and the tone of the literature we read will sooner or later reveal itself in our writing. We should remember, however, that there are innumerable matters of technique that must be mastered before this influence can become operative. We can learn to do a thing only by doing it. In music, for example, we do not learn by hearing great artists play and by trying a selection ourselves occasionally; we must learn through almost endless exercises how individual effects are produced. If some one urges that the reading will be sufficient if it is only done closely and with conscious effort, it may be said in reply that reading is usually least valuable when one is striving to be influenced by it. Such a method cultivates imitativeness rather than individuality, and imitativeness is as undesirable in writing as it is in any other art. To be sure, we should read much while we are learning to write, but we should remember that mere association with art does not produce a skilled craftsman.

C. Injurious: Destroys Spontaneity

Still another objection that students sometimes make to systematic practice in writing is that it destroys spontaneity, — the full, free play of their mental powers, especially the imagination. This objection is based chiefly upon a false conception of spontaneity and the place which it legitimately holds in creative

[1] Stevenson: A letter to Trevor Haddon, a young art student. *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson.* Charles Scribner's Sons.

work. It assumes that whatever is spontaneous is good, and should not be modified. Now the true value of spontaneity lies in its adaptability to some medium that will convey its spirit to others. Unrestrained gush is rarely ever worth writing down. The language of enlightened people is not simply a natural utterance in response to stimulus of some kind; it is spontaneous thought or feeling rendered intelligible; that is, it is spontaneity within the limitations imposed by language. "Let us look at the case in this way: Nature in her loftier and more passionate moods, while detesting all appearance of restraint, is not wont to show herself utterly wayward and reckless; and though in all cases the vital informing principle is derived from her, yet to determine the right degree and the right moment, and to contribute the precision of practice and experience, is the peculiar province of scientific method."[1] The apparent abandon of the master of his art is not freedom from restraint, but easy power of self-direction. Thus it becomes obvious that spontaneity, to be effective, must be reduced to some state of law and order; it must be made to conform to the conventions of language, and it must be adapted to the audience for whom it is written.

Furthermore, this objection does not take into account the necessity of self-conscious processes in all educational training. It assumes that we have thoroughly learned to do a thing before we attempt to do it; and that from the beginning, the execution of newly designed plans is an easy matter. If this were true, the case would be altered; but it is not true. Everything of consequence that we attempt to do after we have passed the years of early infancy involves conscious attention when we first begin to do it. And if we later find that we did not learn accurately or completely, we must again pass through a self-conscious period until we have relearned or modified the knowledge or skill previously acquired. Thus an effort to learn the "touch" system of typewriting for a time makes it impossible for us to write as rapidly as we did when we employed only the

[1] Longinus, *On the Sublime*, II. Havell's translation. The Macmillan Company.

index finger of each hand; but when we learn the new system, writing becomes an almost unconscious activity and leaves us free to concentrate all our attention on the thought we are trying to express. Likewise, the girl who has learned to play "by ear" finds herself almost hopelessly confused when she is taking her first piano lessons; yet when the awkward, self-conscious period is over, she again plays with ease, and with the ease she possesses a sureness unknown to her before. Or, to take another illustration, the boy who grows up in a community where "American German" is spoken thinks he knows much about the German language; but when he goes to school or college and studies the uncorrupted tongue, he finds that there are scores of things which he must unlearn and relearn before he can really be said to write or speak it correctly. In the same manner we must learn our own language. Because of early association, because of our habits of carelessness, or simply because of immaturity, we are compelled to put ourselves through much rigorous training in order that we may later express our individuality freely, yet in conformity to the demands of the language in which we write. In the process we should have no fear for our spontaneity. If it is vigorous enough to be worth keeping, it will in due time emerge from the mental background in which it has been temporarily obscured. We might well apply the words of Saint-Gaudens to the study of our own art: "You are not going to make or ruin your imagination while here. That is something that will remain if you have it in you; that you cannot acquire if you are not blessed with it. But here you may learn to handle your tools. So measure, copy, plumb." [1]

D. Uninteresting: A Dull Grind without Practical Compensation

A fourth objection is that training in writing is uninteresting; that it requires long hours of grinding work and offers little prac-

[1] Quoted by Homer Saint-Gaudens in the *Century Magazine*, Vol. 78, p. 615.

tical compensation. This objection may arise from the failure of the teacher to adapt the course to the needs of the student, or it may grow out of the student's own habitual indifference and deadened feeling of responsibility. In either case the fault is not inherently in the teaching of composition, but in unnecessary attendant circumstances. If a teacher has disregarded the laws of interest in planning a course, he can through careful study of conditions learn what should be done in order to render criticism pointless. Usually, however, the objection grows out of the student's false notion of what is interesting. A thing is interesting not because it is easy or because it is novel, but because it touches our own experience or our own welfare. If, then, we make no effort to put our training in composition to a legitimate use, or if we do not strive to see how it thus might be made serviceable if need should arise, it will, of course, be nothing more than a dry academic exercise. On the other hand, if we try to utilize it in our study of other subjects, in our social recreation, and in the work toward which we are looking for permanent occupation, it will be full of vitality. The indifferent student of mathematics becomes deeply interested in the subject when he decides to become an engineer; the student who dislikes Latin finds it teeming with interest when he becomes a student of Romance literature; and the listless student of chemistry or zoölogy discovers that the subject is a pleasant one after he has fully determined to be a physician. Likewise the student of composition finds new delight in his work when he sees how it increases his opportunities in other academic pursuits, in social life, in business, and in the professions.

III. THE VALUE OF TRAINING

A. Cultivation of the Mind

With these objections out of the way it ought to become much easier for us to see the value of training in composition. What, then, is this value? What, presupposing at least a submissive

willingness to learn, is a student to gain by giving his time and energy to a course in writing? If we put aside the discipline which results from the study of the comparatively small body of theory necessary in carrying on practice with profit, — and this study is, of course, as valuable as the study of theory in any other subject, — we have still to inquire into the effects which regular practice under direction will produce. Let us notice first the value of this practice as educative drill, as a means of increasing one's mental efficiency.

1. **Cultivation by sharpening observation.** — In developing the analytical and creative powers of the mind, it is necessary to have as a basis the power of wide and accurate observation. Too frequently, it is to be feared, students regard the habit of looking at things intently as something that should be suppressed because they think it betrays a childish or rural curiosity. In its stead they cultivate an attitude of condescending indifference. This, unfortunately, always contributes much to the destruction of the spirit of inquiry, and frequently causes the ones who encourage it the humiliating misfortune of experiencing a vague falsehood every time they look at anything. Such an attitude should be discouraged by every self-respecting student. It is no indication of childishness to want to see things as they are. The physician must study his patient; the lawyer, his client or witness or jury; the merchant, his customers; the architect, the surroundings of his proposed building; the newspaper man, the circumstances of his "story." In truth, the man who is capable of doing superior work of any kind is almost invariably a close observer. Ibsen, the dramatist, often revealed this characteristic of mental superiority. It is said that he one day addressed a friend: "You never notice anything. For instance, you don't remember at this moment the color of the wall paper in your own bedroom. But when I enter a strange room, I notice the very smallest details. Nothing escapes me. Yes, I see everything." Hear, too, the words of a great teacher:

"In my judgment, then, your first care should be to learn to

observe. A simple matter — one, I dare say, which it will seem to you difficult to avoid. You have a pair of eyes; how can you fail to observe? Ah! but eyes can only look, and that is not observing. We must not rest in looking, but must penetrate into things, if we would find out what is there. And to find this out is worth while, for everything when observed is of immense interest. There is no object so remote from human life that when we come to study it we may not detect within its narrow compass illuminating and therefore interesting matter. But it makes a great difference whether we do thus really observe, whether we hold attention to the thing in hand, and see what it contains. Once, after puzzling long over the charm of Homer, I applied to a learned friend and said to him, 'Can you tell me why Homer is so interesting? Why can't you and I write as he wrote? Why is it that his art is lost, and that to-day it is impossible for us to awaken an interest at all comparable to his?' . . . 'Well,' said my friend, 'I have often meditated on that, but it seems to come to about this: Homer looked long at a thing. Why,' said he, 'do you know that if you should hold up your thumb and look at it long enough, you would find it immensely interesting?' Homer looks a great while at his thumb. He sees precisely the thing he is dealing with. He does not confuse it with anything else. It is sharp to him; and because it is sharp to him it stands out sharply for us over thousands of years. Have you acquired this art, or do you hastily glance at insignificant objects? Do you see the thing exactly as it is? Do you strip away from it your own likings and dislikings, your own previous notions of what it ought to be? Do you come face to face with things? If you do, the hardest situation in life may well be to you a delight. . . . Observe, observe, observe in every direction! Keep your eyes open. Go forward, understanding that the world was made for your knowledge, that you have the right to enter into and possess it." [1]

Now practice in composition is valuable, in the first place,

[1] George Herbert Palmer, *The Glory of the Imperfect.* Houghton Mifflin Company.

because it usually compels more careful and more complete observation than we should otherwise make. Do you know how many chairs are in your room? Can you make a rough drawing that will really represent the outlines of the house in which you have lived during the past few weeks, or the building in which you are now sitting? How many of your intimate acquaintances have dark eyes? Can you distinguish the songs of birds which you hear every day? How many of your classmates are left-handed? Doubtless it would make little difference in your life, you may think, whether or not you could answer these questions or others of a similar kind. And it must be admitted that a general, indiscriminate power of observation would be as confusing as it is impossible. But the fact of importance remains: if you were called upon to write about the matters concerned in these questions, you would soon find yourself making the necessary observation. It is surprisingly true that month after month we pass along streets which never become thoroughly familiar to us until we are asked how many houses are in a certain square, or whether J's house is four doors or five from the corner, or whether D's house is yellow or gray. We are not fully alive to the part of the world around us in which we think we are interested until we have tried to communicate to others the results of our observations. Then, in a moment, even before we have written the first word, our minds are directed outward toward the things we have seen, and if we have not seen accurately, we go again to the objects to learn more perfectly what they are and how they look. The continuation of such practice sooner or later makes close observation a habit; and everyone agrees that the ability to see sharply, if without conscious effort, is an invaluable possession.

2. **Cultivation by clarifying and stimulating thought.** — A similarly beneficial effect is produced upon thinking. Although we may never know whether a thought can exist in the mind apart from the words in which thought is expressed, we do know that we cannot have thoughts that are very definite unless they are thus embodied in words. "A beautiful thought and

a beautiful expression either occur as one in a man's mind, or the thought remains as a vague possibility or anticipation only (on the plane of mere feeling) until it finds fitting words." [1] Every day we hear discussions of vexing undergraduate problems, of important educational policies, and of urgent public questions. Yet when we are asked to express an opinion on these matters, we say that we have none; that we must think first. And in the strictest sense we do not have any until we have tried to think our thoughts out into words. Language " makes thinking visible." But it does even more. The clarifying of our own minds by attempts at expression provides us with surer ground on which to build new thoughts. Thus every time we try to express ourselves faithfully, we make the outlines of our own lives more distinct and create new opportunities for further mental activity. This relation of thought and expression is well summarized in these words:

" We doubt whether a man ever brings his faculties to bear with their whole force on a subject until he writes upon it for the instruction or gratification of others. To place it clearly before others, he feels the necessity of viewing it more vividly himself. By attempting to seize his thoughts, and fix them in an enduring form, he finds them vague and unsatisfactory to a degree which he did not suspect, and toils for a precision and harmony of views of which he had never before felt the need. He places his subject in new lights, — submits it to a searching analysis, compares and connects with it his various knowledge, seeks for it new illustrations and analogies, weighs objections, and through these processes often arrives at higher truths than he at first aimed to illustrate. . . . The laborious distribution of a great subject, so as to assign to each part or topic its just position and due proportion, is singularly fitted to give compass and persevering force of thought." [2]

3. **Cultivation by quickening the imagination.** — Happily the influence of systematic practice in writing does not end

[1] S. S. Laurie, *Language and Linguistic Method*, p. 100. The Macmillan Company.
[2] William Ellery Channing, *Remarks on National Literature.*

with sharpened observation and clearer thinking; it extends to another power of the mind, the imagination. The importance of this influence we can appreciate only when we consider the nature of imaginative power. Essentially it is, as the term ought to suggest, the ability to form a mental image of an idea, an object, or the real or possible environment of an object. Contrary to popular belief, it is not a facile skill that is useful only in the making of fairy stories and fanciful pictures; it has a large part in all constructive work. Assuredly the story-writer must see his characters in the idealized world in which they are to move; the dramatist while he writes must see and hear every character on the stage; the painter must see his picture on the untouched canvas; and the sculptor must see the finished statue in the block of marble. But it is equally true that the architect must see the airy shape of the building he plans; the inventor must see his machine complete before he makes any part of it; and the business man must see his new enterprise working in all its details before he takes the first step to make it a reality. We are just beginning to appreciate the fact that in every kind of constructive work the difference between mediocrity and superior efficiency is frequently the difference between little imagination and much.

In its lower or more elementary form the imagination merely reproduces the image of former experiences. For example, we may be able to bring vividly to mind the day when we entered the primary or country school, with all the unusual sights and sounds that made up the new experience; or we may see again our first fire or football game or the first audience that we ever tried to address. But in its higher form, it not only reproduces experiences; it makes them into new combinations. This higher power we call the creative or, more accurately, the productive imagination. The cartoonist employs it in an elementary way when he joins the head of some over-ambitious millionaire to the body of a greedy animal. The unifying idea of selfishness brings the apparently unrelated parts into a new composite. Less simply, in the creation of characters for a

story, the writer combines in one person some of the qualities which he has observed in many different people. When the new combinations are made skillfully, subtly, they are so consistent yet so individual that we say they are new or original. But they are new only in combination. One's imagination never goes wholly beyond the limits of one's experience. Sometimes it seems to do so, but when we study the resulting images closely, we always find that they have been made from elements that were at some time in some degree a part of the experience of the one who combined them. The many poetic conceptions of demons and angels, for instance, seem to be quite unlike anything in human life, yet they are only differently proportioned combinations of qualities that are constantly revealed in men and women. The elements from experience may be very small units and they may be so artistically blended that they cannot be distinguished easily, but they are always present.

It ought not to be difficult to see that any activity which sharpens observation and stimulates thought contributes to the basis of a true imagination. Because we are led to see more and to see everything more accurately, we receive impressions that are definite enough for the imagination to use; and as a result of our efforts to think clearly and sharply, we see a wealth of new relations into which objects and ideas may be brought. Writing helps our imagination, therefore, because the enforced mental alertness wakens us thoroughly. We are quickened until we really see, hear, taste, smell, feel, think, and remember. Consequently, all the innumerable images, thoughts, and memories of our past stand ready for appropriate use. For example, when we glance at an old man in worn clothes walking leisurely through the college campus, only the literal fact may remain in our minds. If, however, we are called upon to write an account of his conduct, we might easily see much more than an old man. We might see his smile of recognition as he approaches a small, ivy-covered dormitory; we might see the alternating light and shadow in his face as he stands before it, lost in reverie; and we might see his deep embarrassment when he unexpectedly

meets some well-dressed man of his own age. "Oh yes, I see," we say, and jot down some notes about the return of an "old grad" who has not "made good." Our entire mental experience helps us to clothe the cold, literal facts with warmth and life.

B. Mastery of the Means of Expression

From this brief consideration of observation, thinking, and imagination, we may say that systematic training in composition helps to provide the first essential to good writing, — an invigorated and quickened mind. But it also provides the other essential, — a mastery of the means of expression. As we have already seen, the person who believes that knowledge about an art may be made a substitute for practice frequently falls short of the highest success because he remains an awkward workman. The student's surest safeguard against such misfortune is much preliminary practice under conditions which enable him to devote a large part of his attention to learning the possibilities of the means at his disposal. Now he who pursues a systematic course in the subject has the advantage of learning in the shortest possible time how to make the writer's means serve him. He is obliged to exercise his skill in planning whole compositions, in organizing and reorganizing paragraphs, in recasting sentences, in revising punctuation, in finding acceptable idioms, and in choosing individual words. In these processes he not only becomes familiar with the mechanics of his art, but is by force of circumstances compelled to exercise the artist's judgment and the artist's taste in making the mechanical means serve his purpose.

C. Deepening of Insight into Literature

If the only beneficial results of training in composition were increased power through the cultivation of the mind, and more certain expression through an enforced familiarity with the tools

of writing, there would be more than sufficient reason for devoting much time to the subject. It has, however, one great value beyond these, — a value usually overlooked or forgotten. The student who has sought intelligently to express himself on paper always has a keener, more sympathetic, and more intelligent appreciation of literature than he had before he tried to write; he has learned the principles of art by trying to follow them. Possibly his attempts at writing have been crude and laborious, but they have helped to develop in him the latent artistic sense that all of us possess in some degree; and, according to the degree of his artistic perception, will he read from the author's point of view. Through a simple and perhaps more or less unconscious putting of himself in the other man's place, he sees the difficulties, the possibilities, and the means of producing effects which the writer saw when he set about his work, and he finds intelligent delight in watching the difficulties disappear, in observing how the possibilities are developed, and in studying the skill with which the writer makes the means subservient to his wishes. This increased interest of the reader who has tried to write is not unlike that of the former college athlete, the amateur actor, the amateur concert singer, and the amateur painter, who, because of some practice in their arts, see more in the game, the play, the music, and the painting than is within the hope of the wholly inexperienced.

This more perfect view that results from practice not only brings the student into closer sympathy with all literary art, but guides him in his choice of reading. Instead of blindly accepting whatever is recommended to him by others or whatever promises the largest number of thrills, he insists in all his reading upon the presence of talent. He has himself learned a little about the writer's art, and at once detects the cheap and flimsy practices of the unskilled. As he grows in knowledge of technique through his own efforts, shallow artifices in the work of others become more and more distasteful to him, while the manifestation of real talent becomes a greater and greater source of joy.

IV. THE NECESSARY ATTITUDE TOWARD TRAINING

We have now seen the importance of a mastery of the art of writing, the weakness of the objections that are occasionally made to systematic courses as a means of gaining this mastery, and the true value of such courses in cultivating one's mental powers, mastering the tools of writing, and deepening one's insight into literature. A knowledge of these things, we may remember, was urged in the earlier part of this chapter because such knowledge always helps to create a wholesome attitude toward work. Now we are ready to look more carefully into the character of this attitude. What spirit can we cultivate that will help us to accomplish most? We cannot, of course, define it adequately in a word, yet as a beginning we might say that it is what we hear called every day the spirit of the craftsman.

A. Love for One's Art

If we study this spirit, we shall find that it implies, in the first place, a love for one's work. It is to be feared that too little of this devotion enters into present-day endeavor. Instead, we too frequently allow the spirit of the factory to creep into what we do. As a result we are always looking beyond the matter in hand, waiting anxiously to get away from our work so that we may turn our attention free to follow the lines of least resistance. If not this, then we are wondering, perhaps with some misgivings, how much what we are doing is really worth, — how much it will bring. In either case, the spirit is reprehensible, and magnifies the pleasure of unproductive ease. On the other hand, the love for our work which earnestness, intelligently directed, will sooner or later develop in the place of this destructive spirit, unfailingly helps to make a perfect product. Stevenson often said, " The best artist is not the man who fixes his eye on posterity, but the man who loves the practice of his art." Why? Because love for our work directs us, stimu-

lates us, and even makes it easier for us to understand and to execute. The worker feels "the 'must' of passionate surrender to an ideal" and as a result gets more of his strength and more of his individuality into what he does, so that there is completeness and finish where a spirit of indifference would have stopped with the merest acceptability. "And there is more satisfaction in doing one's best, in doing a thing artistically and right, than in doing what is after all a merely creditable job. Some of the old violin makers could hardly bear to part with the instruments they had made; it was like giving up a part of themselves. They loved their violins. They were conscious of having done fine work; they had made an art out of their business. It was their play. So it is with every piece of work to which we have given the best that is in us. It satisfies us profoundly." [1]

B. Patience in Labor

Untempered love and unsteadied enthusiasm cannot of themselves guide one to the highest kind of work; another large element of the genuinely productive spirit is patience. We have been told that Plato rewrote the introduction to his *Republic* not less than six times. Vergil, we know, was thoroughly dissatisfied with the *Æneid* after it took the seemingly perfect form which is familiar to us. Goethe said, "At length, after forty years, I have learned to write German." The elder Hazlitt suggests a similar patience: "If such is still my admiration of this man's [Burke's] misapplied powers, what must it have been when I myself was in vain trying, year after year, to write a single essay, nay, a single page or sentence; when I regarded the wonders of his pen with the longing eyes of one who was dumb and a changeling; and when to convey the slightest conception of my meaning to others in words was the height of an almost hopeless ambition." [2] In truth, the history

[1] Luther Halsey Gulick, *The Spirit of the Game.* The *Outlook*, Vol. 85, p. 615.
[2] *On Reading Old Books.*

of literary achievement is full of accounts of remarkable patience. And the writer at the present time finds it just as indispensable. People are living all about us to-day who worked faithfully for five or ten years before they produced anything acceptable. If all these have found it necessary to labor year after year simply to learn their art, any student should be filled with contempt for the spirit which surrenders after a few unsuccessful or partly successful efforts.

C. Open-minded Consideration of Possible Aids

Furthermore, this spirit of the craftsman implies open-mindedness, another essential in the production of the most effective writing. Through it we see beyond all petty prejudices, all favorite opinions about methods of working, all barriers of whatever sort that may stand between us and the possibility of making ourselves more perfectly understood. Moreover, we learn through it to bring all of our knowledge and experience to bear on the problems encountered in mastering our art. Thus we come to see how the methods of craftsmen in other fields of labor may serve us in our own. Likewise we come to see the importance of a study of our own speech as an aid to our writing. Because speech is employed so frequently, it affords many opportunities to improve our expression in ways that contribute to good writing as well as to good speaking. For example, it enables us to try new words which we desire to add to our vocabularies, to form habits of correctness in grammatical structure, to search for acceptable idioms, to sharpen our minds by familiar contact with others, and to clarify our opinions by striving to convey them to our associates. We can, then, profitably bring our own speech, as well as our knowledge of the craftsmanship of other workers, to the aid of our writing.

Likewise we can take advantage of one other opportunity to improve our writing: that which reading always affords. In an earlier paragraph we learned that it was questionable wisdom to try to be influenced directly by our reading, inasmuch

as the pursuance of such a course cultivates mannerisms and usually smothers individuality. We ought not to understand, however, that for these reasons reading should be looked upon as of little consequence to the writer. On the contrary, the student of composition should read some good literature every day. Like conversation, it is always stimulating. Furthermore, because it is the work of the most talented minds who have wrought in the art in which we are interested, it develops high standards of taste. But probably more important than either of these is the fact that it acquaints us with many means of producing effects. As a result, whenever we are in doubt we are prepared to seek the good counsel of one who has proved his ability. Without stooping to the level of slavish imitation, we can learn whether some of the means which he has employed might not lend themselves to the production of the effects we seek. Furthermore, whether or not we ever make conscious use of our reading in this way, we may always read in the sure faith that, if we steadily practice writing, our reading will some time begin to have a quiet influence, and that from that day forth "the echo of the written word" will not forsake us. Standards of movement, of emphasis, and of sound will have established themselves firmly.

This attitude of open-mindedness, moreover, prepares us to gain the full effect of our study and our classroom instruction. Writing cannot be learned by mastering rules. It requires the acquisition of a large fund of knowledge through the study of a comparatively small body of principles, and the application of them to an almost countless number of differing concrete cases. Such procedure, it may be seen, necessitates the intelligent interpretation of all instruction. Suggestions must not be accepted with blind enthusiasm as if they would be fruitful without action on the part of the recipient. He must be alert and discriminating. He must learn when to accept, when to reject; when to follow instinctive feeling, when to apply the advice which he has received. Instruction, he must remember, is for the intelligent. What Newman has aptly said about

learning Latin composition sums up fittingly this attitude of open-mindedness, as well as the whole attitude of the craftsman:

"The great moral I would impress upon you is this, that in learning to write Latin, as in all learning, you must not trust to books, but only make use of them; not hang like a dead weight upon your teacher, but catch some of his life; handle what is given you, not as a formula, but as a pattern to copy and as a capital to improve; throw your heart and mind into what you are about, and thus unite the separate advantages of being tutored and of being self-taught, — self-taught, yet without oddities, and tutorized, yet without conventionalities." [1]

V. COMPOSITION AN ART

All that has just been said about the writer's attitude toward his work implies that writing is an art. And such is the case. Writing is an art, and it must be studied as an art. In fact, we are not ready to turn our attention to the actual study and practice of writing until this conception has become clearly fixed in our minds. Now it does not follow that composition is to be looked upon as a fanciful, impractical kind of study about which frivolous people become wildly ecstatic; nor is it to be compared solely with the drawing and painting taught in the ordinary "art school." It is an art among those arts with which all of us are more or less familiar, such as weaving, cabinet-making, drawing, architecture, painting, sculpture, and music; in no respect wholly like any of these, yet similar to all of them in many essentials. If, then, we have permitted ourselves to use the word "art" without giving much thought to what it means, we ought to pause and ask ourselves what significance the term really bears. Or, if we have said, "Certainly, composition is an art," yet have said it in such a perfunctory way that the words have remained lifeless, we ought to strive anew to appreciate the meaning in the declaration.

[1] *The Idea of a University*, Part II, Chap. IV, §3.

A. The Nature of Art

What, then, is the real nature of art? Art is the application of skill or taste according to " regular and disciplined " methods. It does not include what we ordinarily call nature; that is, the things which are produced apart from the ingenuity of man. It is not science; that is, mere classified knowledge. Furthermore, it is not manufacture in the present-day use of that term; that is, construction with machinelike uniformity. It always requires the individuality of the worker, it expresses the joy he finds in his work, and it implies premeditation or design. Moreover, the worker's design must conform to certain established laws. Thus architecture, though it may express any kind of individual or race temperament, is always in some degree symmetrical; painting and drawing, regardless of the will of the painter or draftsman, must have correctness of perspective; and music must have correctness of time. Furthermore, each one of these arts has very definite limitations. Some subject-matter, for example, that is easily expressed in music cannot be expressed in painting or drawing, or even in the harmony, proportion, contrasts, and intervals of architecture. All the arts are expressions of the individual, yet each has bounds beyond which the individual cannot hope to pass. These limitations go far in establishing the fixed principles in accordance with which he must express himself.

B. Composition as an Art

Writing is like these arts in many essential respects. To begin with, it has, like them, many limitations; that is, it expresses some kinds of subject-matter much more naturally than others. For example, some effects that can be produced easily in architecture, — the impression of mass or of height or depth, — can be produced in words only with the utmost difficulty, and even then with indifferent success. Writing, likewise, involves individuality. The attainments of the writer,

no less than the attainments of the architect, the painter, the sculptor, or the musician, depend in large part upon his natural ability and his native or acquired freshness of outlook upon life. Again, writing requires premeditation or design. In other words, the writer cannot put down on paper everything he thinks about, in the order in which it comes to his mind, and hope to be convincing. He must have due regard for everything that is suggested by the terms selection, order, arrangement; and this ordering must be done according to established principles. In truth, composition is so much like these other arts that it is the universal testimony of writers that they perfect their knowledge of their own subject by studying the work of artists engaged in other fields. Furthermore, many authors, — notably Thackeray, Victor Hugo, Rossetti, William Morris, and Ruskin, — have testified to this close relation by dividing their time between writing and one of the other arts. If other evidence of the close relationship were necessary, it could easily be found in the body of critical terms such as *mass*, *motif*, *movement*, *harmony*, *symmetry*, *tone*, *color*, *rhythm*, *perspective*, and *point of view*, that are common to nearly all the fields of artistic endeavor.

A further basis of comparison valuable for the student of writing lies in the division of arts into *fine* and *instrumental* or *useful*. A fine art "is the expression of man's delight in nature and his sympathy with human joys and sufferings." [1] " . . . fine art, as such, has no practical end whatever. The pleasures which it affords are disinterested pleasures; it creates for us an object for delighted contemplation, nothing more. Its divorce from the world of action is absolute." [2] Thus the beautiful picture, the perfect statue, and the enrapturing symphony are fine art. Our pleasure in them is direct; we

[1] J. A. Symonds, *Essays Speculative and Suggestive*, p. 98. Charles Scribner's Sons.

[2] Bliss Perry, *The Study of Prose Fiction*, p. 208. Houghton Mifflin Company. If you are interested in further definition, read what Sidney Colvin has said under "Fine Art" in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

see or hear, and our emotional lives are nourished. On the other hand, an instrumental or useful art, though expressing some degree of the worker's delight in his work, and affording some immediate pleasure to the beholder, interests man chiefly because it enables him to satisfy other more practical wants; it creates enjoyment because it is serviceable. Thus the convenient office building, the lighthouse tower, and the graceful, powerful locomotive are specimens of instrumental art. To be sure, this, too, may sometimes be beautiful; it may make some immediate appeal to one's æsthetic sense. But its beauty is only an incidental. It appeals primarily to reason; its beauty is the beauty of fitness.

This division is a convenient one in the field of writing. As we shall have occasion to observe many times, it is not perfect; few classifications are. There will be overlapping, and there will be lines that are not very definite, just as there is uncertain ground when we try to mark off epochs in history or to distinguish plants from animals. Nevertheless, the division will serve us better than any other we can make. It is not difficult to see that a beautiful poem, a perfectly designed short story, a well-constructed play, a sublimely conceived novel, or an intimate personal essay belongs in the field of fine art; and it is no more difficult to see that a textbook on chemistry or physics, a report on the ravages of the brown-tailed moth, a petition to a college faculty, a letter of application for a position, or a newspaper account of a railroad wreck is instrumental art. To be sure, we cannot apply the term *fine* directly to writing as we apply it to art generally; but that impossibility is due merely to an unfortunate limitation of the English language. We could express ourselves more accurately if the language contained a word that was exactly the equivalent in meaning of *fine* + *artistic*. Inasmuch as it does not, we must content ourselves to use the nearest equivalent. This is *æsthetic*. Whenever, therefore, it is necessary to refer to the two great divisions of writing, we shall not go far wrong if we call them *æsthetic* and *instrumental*.

C. The Conception Essential

The conception of composition as an art is essential, then, not only because it is the true conception, but because it provides a satisfactory method of study and practice. Through it we can come to have a just notion of the place that natural ability and individuality should have in our work; we can see the value of studying the theory of composition and models of good writing; we can appreciate the fundamental importance of practice; we can understand the limitations that are imposed upon us by our subject-matter and the character of written language; we can see the necessity of premeditation or design; and we can see the further necessity of bringing multiplicity of details under the molding influence of a few great principles. Scarcely less important is the fact that we are guided away from the embarrassment of assuming that since "writing is writing," we can express ourselves effectively only when we phrase our thought in elevated diction. In other words, we are made to see that writing may be instrumental or useful art as well as fine art. We shall hold to this conception in all the chapters that follow.

READINGS AND EXERCISES

1. If you wish to see the importance of full, accurate communication in a people's life, read C. H. Cooley's *Social Organization*. Charles Scribner's Sons.

2. Read Luther Halsey Gulick's *The Spirit of the Game* in the *Outlook* for March 16, 1907 (Vol. 85, p. 615). This is an interesting presentation of the influence of good spirit on one's work.

3. Professor Palmer's *Self-Cultivation in English* shows very clearly how anyone can increase the effectiveness of his writing if only he is willing to work. Every student ought to read and reread this little book. It is published by Houghton Mifflin Company.

4. Professor Brander Matthews's article on *The Duty of Imitation*, in the *Outlook*, Jan. 14, 1911 (Vol. 97, p. 77), distinguishes between helpful and harmful imitation.

5. Are you personally acquainted with a skilled worker in any art? Do you know how he works? Did you ever talk with him about

his ideals in art? Do you think it would be possible to learn anything from him about writing? Read the Reminiscences of Saint-Gaudens in the *Century Magazine*, Vols. 77 and 78.

6. La Farge's *Considerations on Painting* will be profitable reading for anyone who is interested in imaginative writing. Read especially Chapter II.

7. If you wish to study other classifications of writing that are based upon the essential difference between useful art and fine art, read De Quincey's discussion of the literature of knowledge and the literature of power, Professor J. H. Gardiner's longer discussion of literature of thought and literature of feeling, and Professor C. S. Baldwin's treatment of logical composition and literary composition.

De Quincey, *Essays on Style, Rhetoric, and Language*, pp. 238–240. Allyn and Bacon.

Gardiner, *The Forms of Prose Literature*, Introduction. Charles Scribner's Sons.

Baldwin, *A College Manual of Rhetoric*, Introduction. Longmans, Green, and Company.

CHAPTER II — THE WRITER'S MATERIAL

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD MATERIAL

In writing, as in every other art, the first thing to consider is material. To be sure, good material alone will not make writing effective. As Mr. William M. Chase has said concerning material for paintings, one man's picture of a potato may be greater than another's of an angel, because of superior treatment. Similarly, in the field of literature we occasionally find a short story writer like Guy de Maupassant or a poet like Swinburne who, with the slightest material, gains literary eminence through his remarkable technical perfection. Yet cases of this kind are rare. Usually, if what we are asked to read is very slight in substance, we can see no reason for its existence; and quite naturally we exclaim, "Well, what of it?" There is no point for the reader, simply because there was no definite, substantial idea in the mind of the writer. As Voltaire put it, a man must always write badly when he has nothing to say. And Lowell was quite justified in his remark: "Blessed are those who have nothing to say — and cannot be persuaded to say it!" For communication without substance, however graceful or brilliant the technique of the writer, is fundamentally absurd. There can be no real definiteness, no real sincerity, where the writing is essentially empty.

II. THE CHARACTER OF GOOD MATERIAL

All incidents, all facts, all ideas, are not necessarily good material for composition. The writer must not be content with saying something; he must say something significant. In other words, he must exercise judgment in choosing what he is

to write about. First opinions of what is worth most are by no means always supported by maturer judgment. It is evident that the tests applied to material intended for informational writing cannot be used if the writing is designed to amuse or charm. Moreover, all facts are not equally significant, all ideas are not equally sound, all occurrences are not equally true to life; nor will the material that appeals to one reader and suits one occasion be equally well adapted to every other reader and occasion. Considering these differences in the character of material, both in its general possibilities and in its particular availability for a given piece of writing, it is plainly a matter of importance to the student of composition to develop a reliable judgment in determining what is good material and what is not.

A. Truth

In the first place, it is essential that the subject-matter be true. No writing can possibly be convincing which conveys material that is in any way false, for a reader will not give his attention long after the reliability and good faith of the writer have come into question. To be sure, there are various kinds of truth. Truth as a quality of writing is never absolute any more than it is necessarily literal. The truth of history or science is one thing, the truth of philosophy or criticism is another; the truth of fiction is not the truth of the fairy tale, nor is the truth of realism the truth of romance.

1. **In instrumental writing.** — In writing that is intended to give information, such as biography or history or science, truth is primarily truth to fact; that is, accuracy. When anyone receives a letter specifying the terms of a business transaction, or reads a newspaper account of some public movement, or consults an encyclopedia for the details of some famous piece of engineering, he wants actual information and he must be able to depend upon the writer to give him the exact truth. Nor is this accuracy in detail, this matter of unassailably true

facts, any mean virtue. But a fuller accuracy is necessary, though often disregarded. As Parkman says in his Introduction to the *Pioneers of France in the New World*:[1] "Faithfulness to the truth of history involves far more than a research, however patient and scrupulous, into special facts. Such facts may be detailed with the most minute exactness, and yet the narrative, taken as a whole, may be unmeaning or untrue. The narrator must seek to imbue himself with the life and spirit of the time. He must study events in their bearings near and remote; in the character, habits, and manners of those who took part in them. He must himself be, as it were, a sharer or a spectator of the action he describes." It is this complete accuracy, this telling of the whole truth, which the "popular" writer so often misses. It is easy to collect facts which are demonstrably true in themselves, yet present them in a way that will seriously violate essential truth. All too often, journalists write sensational articles about public men or public causes which are inaccurate and unfair because they offer incomplete facts. Likewise, the scientist who goes too far in simplifying the facts of nature for the popular mind is seriously misleading. The writer should remember, then, that his social duty demands not only that he adhere to literal truth, but also that he strive after complete truth.

Much writing, however, which appeals primarily to a reader's intellect does not convey facts; it explains or urges ideas. In material of this kind, truth is not truth to fact, but truth to reason; that is, soundness. The writer who has opinions about the social life of his college or his city, about the conduct of a friend or a public official, must test them not so much by their accuracy in matters of fact, but rather by their reasonableness. He must ask himself whether his ideas are the result of clear, true thinking or, on the contrary, thinking which is hasty or superficial or prejudiced. So the difference in the value of two men's discussion of an educational or civic issue may very well be basically a difference in the soundness of the ideas pre-

[1] Copyright by Little, Brown, and Company.

sented. Again, an element of proof may enter into the writing, as when one seeks to establish some scientific theory or to secure the adoption of some political measure. Then the test of the material is truth to argumentative reasoning; and the ideas are serviceable only when they carry conviction.

2. In æsthetic writing. — In writing which is addressed primarily to the imagination, the requirements of truth are often misunderstood. There is first the problem of dealing satisfactorily with actualities; that is, with the material which is taken from real life. In recounting an amusing train experience, or in chatting reminiscently of childhood days, the young writer is occasionally perplexed to know how far he may take liberties with the literal details of his own experience. May an extra bundle or two be added to a fellow passenger's luggage and a touch of incongruous color to his costume? May the swimming hole at grandfather's farm be combined with the orchard at Uncle Tom's? May a clever retort heard years after be moved back to the old schoolhouse days? Or must everything be set down exactly as it happened? Of course, in autobiography or any other writing where the reader expects accurate information there can be no such question. But when the writing is done frankly to amuse or to charm, the writer need not "spoil a good story" or miss a good effect, by holding himself to literal truth. Thus we find Ik Marvel saying in the introductory chapter of *Dream Life:* "No, no, . . . imagination has been playing pranks with memory; and if I have made the feeling real, I am content that the facts should be false. Feeling indeed has a higher truth in it than circumstance. It appeals to a larger jury for acquittal; it is approved or condemned by a better judge. And if I can catch this bolder and richer truth of feeling, I will not mind if the types of it are all fabrications." And many another piece of personal writing is skillfully touched up by the writer's imagination, yet remains essentially true.

On the other hand, a writer often believes that any incident, however unusual, or any detail, however extraordinary, will be

suitable if only he can cite its counterpart in real life. If he recounts actual occurrences, if he copies characters who actually lived somewhere, he feels sure that his writing must seem true. So we have heroes making long shots such as some exceptional marksman has once been known to make, or escaping from prison in a way which, according to some newspaper, was successfully taken by some lucky convict. Likewise, we have heroines who represent all the beauty and cleverness and virtue which certain unusual women have been known to possess. In every case, the writer's confident faith in the truth of his work rests on the fact that he has known some one, or heard of some one, in real life, who did or said exactly what is done or said in the story. As if truth were never known to be stranger than fiction! And as if truth could not afford to be stranger than fiction always! When something strange happens to happen in actual life, we accept it as a freak circumstance, but when something of the same improbable sort comes in fiction we resent the "long arm of coincidence" and say it all sounds too much like a storybook. It is no defense for the essentially untrue to urge that things really happened that way once.

What is true of actualities in fiction is equally true of the writer's imaginings. When the writer uses new material instead of reproducing the material of actual life, he must be sure that what he makes up, although entirely imaginary, gives the impression of reality. To kill a cat with a snowball or have a blind girl suddenly regain her sight is too improbable to be convincing. Similarly, to make a slow, dumb fellow nimbly grasp the meaning of some mysterious signal, or have a confirmed villain suddenly change his ways, or give some lofty vision to a spiritual insensate, fails to impress one as true to life. To be sure, any of these things might conceivably happen in life, but when they happen in fiction, the reader gets an unpleasant impression that the writer has arranged things too much to suit his purpose. The illusion of reality fails. The reader resents the too evident inconsistency. If he is led to expect the improbable or the impossible, that is a very different matter.

According to the hypothesis of a fairy tale, for example, it is not at all incongruous or inconsistent for trees to talk, or men to fly, or the world to have a fourth dimension. Again, in burlesque, effects may be piled up, coincidences devised, realities even reversed, since the writer starts out to exaggerate and the reader soon catches his attitude. It is not, then, that everything used for æsthetic writing must be true to fact, or even true to life, but the material in this as in all writing must be such that the reader gets what he has a right to expect. There must be no falseness of any kind, no inaccuracy, no inconsistency, no misrepresentation. There must be essential truthfulness always.

B. Interest

A second essential of good material is interest. However true one's facts or ideas or impressions of life may be, they are not worth writing down unless they have some real significance. The man who has had some hairbreadth escape from death, or traveled part way around the globe, or conjured up a series of thrilling exploits, is not necessarily supplied with excellent literary material. Likewise, he who happens to know how many kinds of fish are mentioned in Shakespeare, or thinks he has discovered Chaucer's favorite flower, has not necessarily information of great human significance. On the other hand, he who has never been in a burning building, pursued desperate bandits, run off a bridge in an unmanageable automobile, or lived in Alaska or New Zealand, is not necessarily without something to write about. The truth of the matter is that novelty is not the only element of interest in material; and all that is close at hand and part of the normal experience of the average man is not commonplace and unworthy of the writer's consideration.

To begin with, the material must interest the writer himself. If he has certain facts about birds or stars or men, they must fill him with all the enthusiasm of a discoverer. If he has certain impressions about life, he must feel their humor, their

pathos, their charm, their truth, deeply. If he has certain ideas about conduct, or certain plans for some enterprise, he must be very sure of their truth and value. Again and again writers fail because they attempt to present material which has not gripped them irresistibly. Again and again, on the other hand, writers jump from mediocrity to a high degree of effectiveness simply by turning from those things which they think they are obliged to say to those things which are closest to their real interests, the objects of their deepest study and fondest dreams. One young writer, a college freshman, did his required theme work perfunctorily, and sighed with relief as he neared the end of the year; but one day in conversation with his instructor he confessed his master passion, cartooning. Not once had he written about this secret center of his thoughts and ambition, because, as he said, he didn't know he could! In his next theme, however, he set about explaining the exact difference between a cartoon and a caricature, and soon after that he discussed the influence of the cartoon in political campaigns. Each time he wrote eagerly, drawing on the rich fund of information he had accumulated and employing original sketches and newspaper clippings to illustrate his work; and for the first time in his life he wrote well. He had written out of the fullness of his own knowledge and with sincere enthusiasm for the task. This discovery of the best possible material on the part of this young writer is in no way exceptional. It is true from the humblest to the greatest. Material is flat, without possibilities, unless it interests the writer himself.

In a sense, anything that interests the writer can be made to interest his reader, for, as we shall see in a later chapter, a reader's interest may be enlisted through the writer's contagious enthusiasm for his subject. Ordinarily we judge material interesting when it has certain inherent qualities which cause it to appeal to people generally, and often we measure its value by the range of its appeal, counting those things relatively best which interest many people and those things relatively poor which appeal to few people. Thus we have material which is

so vitally important to the physical, mental, or moral life of mankind, which so profoundly touches some one of the great elemental emotions, such as love, hate, fear, jealousy, or revenge, that we call it universal. Material of this sort appears in the great epics like the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, *Beowulf*, and the *Nibelungenlied*, or in the great dramas like Shakespeare's *Othello* or *Hamlet*. Neither time nor place limits its interest. Again there is material which appeals to but one age, one nationality, one social class, one locality, one trade or profession. It, too, is interesting, and worth writing, but it cannot be expected to transcend its limitations and attract wide, sustained attention.

1. **In instrumental writing.** — In most writing which is done to inform and mold opinion and fix belief, the appeal is, of course, primarily intellectual, and the material depends for its interest chiefly on its relation to individual or social welfare. To be sure, knowledge may be prized to some extent for its own sake; and, again, the power of certain information to attract attention may be due largely to its timeliness or its freakishness. But for the most part the range and degree of interest in material designed to instruct or convince will be determined by its human significance; that is, by the way in which it affects the important needs and activities of mankind. Consider the contents of a serious magazine or of a thoughtful man's library. The subject-matter of the articles and books will include such things as currency reform, college administration, government ownership of public utilities, woman suffrage, the psychology of religious experience, the open shop, reform in court procedurel international arbitration, the social teachings of Jesus, popular election of United States senators, the art of the American Indians, the intellectual life of Japan, Tolstoi's views of art, forest conservation, and the reclamation of waste land. These are manifestly matters which may be expected to take hold of a reader's mind, for they are matters which vitally concern not a few persons, not a special class or group of persons, but more or less all persons, at least in our generation and in our country.

2. **In æsthetic writing.** — On the other hand, wherever the appeal is to the reader's imagination, material is more or less interesting according to its power to take hold of the emotional side of human nature. Doubtless it is impossible to determine in advance just what elements are necessarily involved in giving material this broad human interest, as the inability of the play producer to anticipate public taste well shows. Nevertheless, it is decidedly suggestive to observe the subjects of favorite pictures in the great public art galleries or in the homes of the people. It is even more instructive to study the circulation reports of the public libraries, since they give a record of public preferences which is highly significant. From such sources, and from our own personal experience, we may venture to generalize to some extent about the kind of material which has genuine emotional interest. On the negative side, it appears altogether unnecessary for material to be thrilling or sensational or even unusual in order to appeal to the emotions of the average reader. The idea that original material is essential to successful writing is manifestly untrue, since from Chaucer to Mark Twain writers have taken up some old story or some common bit of everyday life and found therein an idea for a deeply interesting work. It would seem that Ruskin was altogether right in his comment that "the passage in the *Iliad* which has on the whole excited most admiration is that which describes a wife's sorrow at parting from her husband, and a child's fright at its father's helmet." On the positive side, it can readily be observed that there are certain things which contribute largely to literary interest, such as mystery, adventure, love, pathos, humor, sentiment, picturesqueness, melancholy, and heroism. Moreover, certain places seem to have an unfailing charm; for instance, the sea, the forest, the quiet farm, the noisy city. More than all else, however, that which is familiar seems to attract attention; not necessarily that which duplicates the reader's experiences, but that which at least suggests his own experiences. For after all, interest, the deep and abiding interest which is most worth while, is largely a matter

of striking familiar chords, of touching the big, vital feelings of our common human nature.

C. Adaptability

As may have been evident in the preceding pages, the value of material must be measured finally by its availability for a given piece of writing. It should always be borne in mind that writing is no matter for detached speculation; there is always a particular writer who is saying a particular thing to a particular audience under particular conditions. So within rather narrow limits the essential truth of some material may vary with the reader or the occasion, as does the degree of interest within much wider limits. But however true and interesting material may be, it must be manageable under all the particular limitations of the work, else the writing loses its highest effectiveness or even fails entirely.

1. **In instrumental writing.** — In the case of instrumental composition, where the conditions of the communication are very definite, the writer must subject his material to both qualitative and quantitative tests. He must be sure, first, that the material he means to present is such that both he and his reader can manage it well. Very often writers attempt to discuss matters which are really too complex or too delicate or too heavy for them to grasp, subjects which involve special knowledge or special powers of mind that they do not have; or they forget the immaturity, the lack of knowledge, the fixed prejudices of their readers. We laugh at the high school youth who essays to discuss The Perils of Our Republic or Man's Duty to Man. We see the foolhardiness of writing an article for the general public on the precession of the equinoxes or Grimm's law of consonant shifts. And yet, commonly enough, a writer without any great power of analysis attempts to discuss a tangled political or social problem, only to touch it superficially or make it hopelessly confusing for the reader. Another, utterly lacking the judicial temper, will take up some character in history

about whom there is great difference of opinion, and either conclude weakly that there is much to be said on both sides or yield to prejudice without any careful application of fundamental principles of judgment. Material bearing on the high cost of living, for example, or the decreasing influence of the clergy, or Lincoln's religion, or Aaron Burr's character, may be excellent so far as truth and interest are concerned, and yet be utterly unavailable in a given case because of the writer's unfitness to deal with it. Or, it may be that material which is otherwise altogether acceptable will not fit the class of readers addressed. Just as many a preacher cannot use certain sound and vital ideas in addressing a particular congregation, a writer is obliged to reject material which does not fit his readers. Unless his ideas appeal to the mentality of those who constitute his audience, and avoid their uncontrollable prejudices, he must assume a handicap which will test his powers of sympathy and persuasion to the utmost.

Then, too, the writer must watch the quantity of his material. It is possible for him to have either too little or too much for his particular reader and for the time and space available. On the one hand, he must have material enough to make his work adequate and satisfying. There must be nothing hasty or incomplete or superficial or slight about it. On the other hand, the writer must not have so much to say that under the conditions of his writing his work will necessarily be overcrowded and confusing. Of course, it is easy for one who is writing out of the fullness of his heart, with sure knowledge and deep conviction, to have more to say than he can compress into the available space or simplify for the ordinary reader. But certainly there is no excuse for the mistake commonly made by inexperienced writers, of rushing eagerly into some big subject like electricity, athletics, or coeducation, quite regardless of whether they are to write two pages or two hundred. In any case, a writer must limit his material to suit the conditions of his writing.

2. **In æsthetic writing.** — Likewise, in æsthetic composition it is not to be understood that any material which is essen-

tially true and interesting is necessarily available for a given piece of work. In the first place, it may not be adapted to the abilities of the writer. Some material is so big and powerful that those possessed of only ordinary artistic skill cannot manage it. For instance, to succeed in describing some natural wonder, a sunset with all its gorgeous color changing magically into the softest tints, an awe-inspiring cañon, or a sublime mountain peak, requires unusual powers of perception and expression. It is no mere accident that few, if any, of even the great writers have ever attempted to describe Niagara Falls. Moreover, there is similar material for narrative writing which calls not only for perfected technique but also for maturity of experience in the writer himself. It was the mature Shakespeare who wrote *King Lear* and *Othello* and *Hamlet*, not the young author of *Romeo and Juliet*. Likewise, mature men gave us *The Scarlet Letter*, *Vanity Fair*, and *The Egoist*. So, in any case, it takes the seasoned man, the one who has lived long enough to know life fully and to have his ideas about life thoroughly tested, to manage the heavier human experiences successfully. It is but practical wisdom, then, for every young writer to consider his own powers, both personal and technical, before attempting to treat ideas or impressions which appeal to him because of their truth or beauty.

More than this, nearly every writer has a special vein which it is best for him to work, and material will be suitable or unsuitable for his use according to this special ability to do one kind of thing well and another less well. One writer will have a vein of sentiment pure and noble. He ought by all means to write it out freely. Another who cannot handle sentiment without running over into sentimentality must let it alone. Similarly, one writer will have peculiar sympathy with child life and handle it with genuine charm, whereas another can write nothing about children that is not stilted, but he can present faithfully the Labrador fisherman. Such special abilities appear plainly enough in writers as great as Stevenson, Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, Jane Austen, Hawthorne, and Lamb, and

they are even more likely to appear in those less gifted. Whatever his powers may be, a writer does well to recognize them frankly. Instead of sinking into discouraged silence because he does not have the gifts of homely wisdom, delicate fancy, simple pathos, or nonsensical humor which some one else has, he ought by all means to take advantage of his own gift. In his individuality he has not his chief hindrance but his best asset.

The material must also fit the literary form chosen. Just as in the past writers have been misled by their own theories or by some literary vogue to put square pegs into round holes, so it is possible now that the careless writer will use material for a short story which should be handled only in a novel, or put an idea into a drama which belongs only in a sermon. Critics have found much of Wordsworth's material essentially prosaic in spite of his ideas about the poetic possibilities of the simple and the commonplace. They have pointed out that what Chapman had to say did not fit the drama any better than George Eliot's ideas fitted the novel: each followed a prevailing literary fashion. Perhaps at the present time there is a tendency to take almost any idea and make it the material for a short story without reference to the requirements of that rather strict form. But it must be understood that each distinct literary form has special requirements which good material, really adaptable material, must satisfy; and æsthetic writing, done in an essentially disinterested spirit, cannot use material which is too much related to some practical end. Accordingly, whenever material is used in a way contrary to its real appropriateness, the results are necessarily worse than they need be. No writer, whatever his skill, can get the best results when he gives material a form of expression to which it is really not adaptable.

III. GETTING MATERIAL FOR INSTRUMENTAL COMPOSITION

Nevertheless, it is not enough to understand the character of good material. A writer has still before him the problem

of making it available for his own use. To be sure, in much of the writing which is done to meet the demands of everyday life, the occasion really supplies the subject-matter. The student who writes a notice for the college bulletin board or a petition to the faculty gets his material straight from his loss of a fountain pen or his need of two extra credits for graduation. Likewise, the lawyer who dictates a letter concerned with the settlement of an estate, or a scientist who publishes the results of his latest research, gets his material from his current activities without any special effort. But often it is very different: the writer must furnish the ideas himself, and until he thinks of something to say or sees something interesting in life to set down, he cannot write. Then his own faculties must serve him; his mind must be active, his senses keen, his imagination lively. And so far as may be necessary, he must know how to draw on sources outside himself.

A. Finding the Germ Idea

Finding material for instrumental composition involves two distinct problems. There is first the need of an idea, a seed thought. As we have just said, this may come to the writer as a part of the occasion for writing; it may come by assignment, as in much journalistic work; but ordinarily it must come out of the productive mind of the writer himself. He must be a man of ideas. This is not anything to frighten the person who is devoid of genius. It means thoughtfulness, or habits of reflection; he who plunges along through life without ever stopping for quiet thought cannot hope to have anything to say which is of serious consequence. It means alertness, especially in observing such significant details as the merchant or the physician or the naturalist must observe. It means imagination, such as the inventor, the capitalist, or the statesman shows in his power to project thought beyond the actual. It means analytic power, the resolving of complex matters into their simple elements; and sound reasoning, the demonstrating

of such relationships as cause and effect. But more than anything else it means thinking for oneself.

There can be no intellectual productiveness without self-reliant individuality. Of course, nothing broad and sound can come from one who closes his mind wholly to outside influences in conceited self-sufficiency; such an extreme is both intolerable and unprofitable. But if a person is to have any definite and significant ideas, he must do his own thinking. He must not tolerate indifferent stagnation or weak dependence on the thoughts of others. He must have a wholesome curiosity, an active mind which insists on knowing and knowing at first hand. Strange as it sounds, Schopenhauer's warning against making reading a substitute for thought of one's own is wise, for overmuch reading does deprive the mind of all elasticity, like keeping a spring continually under pressure. Furthermore, as he says, "A man may have discovered some portion of truth or wisdom, after spending a great deal of time and trouble in thinking it over for himself and adding thought to thought; and it may sometimes happen that he could have found it all ready to hand in a book and spared himself the trouble. But even so, it is a hundred times more valuable if he has acquired it by thinking it out for himself. For it is only when we gain our knowledge in this way that it enters as an integral part, a living member, into the whole system of our thought; that it stands in complete and firm relation with what we know; that it is understood with all that underlies it and follows from it; that it wears the color, the precise shade, the distinguishing mark, of our own way of thinking; that it comes exactly at the right time, just as we felt the necessity for it; that it stands fast and cannot be forgotten." [1]

In spite of good counsel of this kind, many persons, especially young students of composition, are inclined to doubt the value of their own ideas. However healthy they really are in their thinking, they fear that because an idea is their own rather than a more famous person's, it must be foolish or of little

[1] Schopenhauer, *The Art of Literature*, p. 62. Translation by Bailey Saunders.

consequence. Emerson cites an instance of this very lack of self-confidence in his essay on *Intellect*, and comments on it characteristically: "We are all wise. The difference between persons is not in wisdom but in art. I knew, in an academical club, a person who always deferred to me; who, seeing my whim for writing, fancied that my experiences had somewhat superior; whilst I saw that his experiences were as good as mine. Give them to me and I would make the same use of them. He held the old; he holds the new; I had the habit of tacking together the old and the new which he did not use to exercise. This may hold in the great examples. Perhaps, if we should meet Shakespeare, we should not be conscious of any steep inferiority; no, but of a great equality, — only that he possessed a strange skill of using, of classifying his facts, which we lacked. For notwithstanding our utter incapacity to produce anything like Hamlet and Othello, we see the perfect reception this wit and immense knowledge of life and liquid eloquence find in us all." Certainly there is no better encouragement to sane, vigorous trust in one's own ideas than that which this same author gives in the opening lines of his essay on *Self-Reliance:* "To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men, — that is genius. Speak your latent conviction, and it shall be the universal sense; for the inmost in due time becomes the outmost, and our first thought is rendered back to us by the trumpets of the Last Judgment. Familiar as the voice of the mind is to each, the highest merit we ascribe to Moses, Plato, and Milton is that they set at naught books and traditions, and spoke not what men but what *they* thought. A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within, more than the luster of the firmament of bards and sages. Yet he dismisses without notice his thought, because it is his. In every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts; they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty. Great works of art have no more affecting lesson for us than this. They teach us to abide by our spontaneous impression with good-humored inflexibility

then most when the whole cry of voices is on the other side. Else to-morrow a stranger will say with masterly good sense precisely what we have thought and felt all the time, and we shall be forced to take with shame our own opinion from another."

B. Developing the Material

1. From personal sources. — When a writer has a germ idea, then, he is started toward composition. But he is only started. A second step is necessary before he is ready to write. His idea must be developed; the conception must be worked out in detail; material must be gathered to clarify or amplify or strengthen the original thought. To this end the writer will often continue to draw on his own mental resources and his own experience. For instance, he may think that the agitation which fills our country for months before a presidential election is really a thorough test of the nation's vitality, and by concentrated thinking develop this idea into an editorial. Again, he may have an idea about the growth of musical taste and find in his own changing attitudes toward music the right stuff for an essay. Thus comes the raw material for a great range of instructive autobiographic pieces, as well as for a wealth of essays conveying the writer's opinions about what he has observed around him in life. Indeed, there is far more material for writing to be drawn from purely personal sources than most students suppose. And provided the writer possesses real intellectual power and true skill in choosing between the significant and the insignificant, such personal material is highly desirable, since it has the merits of abundance, definiteness, and individuality.

2. From printed sources. — Nevertheless, personal sources are often inadequate to supply the material for developing the writer's idea. He may need many more facts than he has had any opportunity to observe or could possibly collect for himself by individual investigation. Perhaps, too, he may want to

familiarize himself with the ideas about his subject held by men of another generation or another social class. In fact, experience soon demonstrates that there are many reasons why he must look to outside sources for additional material. Yet it is not altogether a simple matter to draw from encyclopedias and treatises and bound periodicals and newspaper files the material which is needed to work out his idea. Many a person gets along without any sources whatever or takes the first book he finds touching his subject, rather than go through the appalling mass of material which a library catalogue or some expert adviser points out. But the trained person, such as a reference librarian or an experienced author, gets the best material with comparative ease. Such skill in the use of printed sources comes, of course, only by practice, but a few suggestions may be helpful to the beginner.

In the first place, there is the matter of accuracy. We have learned earlier in this chapter that material which is in any way untrue cannot be acceptable for purposes of composition; hence it is important to collect facts or ideas from printed sources with the strictest care. One might suppose that unless a writer were positively unscrupulous and shifty, he would read his sources closely and transcribe his data accurately. But as a matter of fact, there is a great deal of unintentional yet serious inaccuracy among literary workers. To begin with, there is a shameful amount of sheer carelessness in the average person; he cannot set facts down straight or reproduce statements of opinion faithfully. But the gravest fault is that of taking matter out of its context or taking only that part of a reference which suits one's preconceived notions. The familiar remark that you can prove anything by statistics doubtless owes its point to the frequency with which contending writers make census reports or some other compilation of figures prove opposite sides of a question. Similarly, it is possible to garble almost any article so that the author's attitude will seem quite different from what it is in reality. Accuracy, then, in the fullest sense, means not only a correct recording of what is actually

taken from the sources consulted, but also taking enough from these sources to represent their true spirit.

Closely connected with accuracy in the use of printed sources is thoroughness. Of course, thoroughness is a relative matter, and the conditions under which writing is done affect the degree of thoroughness which is essential or even possible. We cannot expect a feature story in a Sunday newspaper to be prepared as thoroughly as an article in an authoritative reference work. But it is important for the writer to remember that the reliability and the permanent value of his work depend largely on the completeness with which he collects his material. He may not be able to use all that he collects, but if he has any ambition to produce a real work of scholarship, he must have the patience to consult all sources that could possibly yield anything significant, whether they be few or many, easily accessible or accessible only with special exertion. The following paragraph from Parkman's introduction to his *Pioneers of France in the New World*[1] may serve to bring the inexperienced investigator to a realization of what thoroughness in authorship means: "With respect to that special research which, if inadequate, is still in the most emphatic sense indispensable, it has been the writer's aim to exhaust the existing material of every subject treated. While it would be folly to claim success in such an attempt, he has reason to hope that, so far at least as relates to the present volume, nothing of much importance has escaped him. With respect to more general preparation . . . he has long been too fond of his theme to neglect any means within his reach of making his conception of it distinct and true." We are told, too, that one of Huxley's chief reasons for learning Greek was that he might be able to see for himself whether Aristotle really said that the heart had only three chambers. In fact, it is a commonplace of scholarship that a writer must learn a language, visit a foreign library, exhaust every possible expedient, rather than fail to consult any important source.

But the young writer will wonder whether thoroughness

[1] Copyright by Little, Brown, and Company.

which involves such enormous labor can ever be harmonized with the demands for prompt or frequent writing. Can one who aims at thoroughness, and yet cannot devote all his time to research, ever hope to produce more than one or two books in a lifetime? Must one who is obliged to turn out a theme, a report, or a magazine article in a short space of time be inevitably superficial? Nothing is impossible in this demand. Thoroughness is neither forbidding nor wasteful if the investigator knows how to strike a nice balance between thoroughness and economy. Experience shows many ways of saving time and energy, many perfectly legitimate short cuts. For the most part, these economical methods are purely personal; each writer who is obliged to consult printed sources soon develops ways of working which are suited to his own habits of mind. Nevertheless, some suggestions can be offered from the common experience of many literary workers.

For instance, it is a great advantage to know the standard works of reference, — not only the general encyclopedias and dictionaries, but also the principal volumes dealing with special subjects; to know just what kind of material each contains and how it is arranged. Thus a writer will lose no time in searching promiscuously. He can also save himself much effort by using all available indexes and bibliographies, such as Poole's *Index to Periodical Literature* and lists of select references on special topics. Then, besides this intelligent familiarity with the apparatus of reference work, certain short cuts in reading are useful. The writer ought to know how to take full advantage of the information given in the table of contents and the preface or introduction of the book consulted. He ought to turn his own skill in writing to account by picking out the topic sentences, the summary paragraphs, and the transitional passages which " put in a nutshell " what has been said and what is to follow. He ought to learn to read rapidly through the pages, concentrating his attention closely on those parts alone which give him important material. Intelligent browsing is a real art. He ought also to keep putting the question

to himself as he reads, in order to make sure that he is not slipping off the main line of his search and burdening himself with irrelevant matter. Finally, he must practice economy in taking his notes. Most people waste much energy in entering up data from their reading. A writer ought not to take down more than he needs; and ordinarily he can avoid copying long extracts from his sources verbatim. Moreover, he ought by all means to take his notes in such permanent form that he can keep them for possible reference at a later time without copying them. As an aid in this direction, he ought to develop some plan of his own, systematic yet flexible, which he can use without stopping again and again to worry over some new point of form or policy. In all these ways and in many others that every writer will learn from experience, it is possible to economize time and effort in using printed sources without in any sense compromising standards of accuracy and thoroughness.

One other suggestion may be made about the use of printed sources: the writer must be careful to discriminate between valuable sources and sources of questionable value. In the first place, he must remember that facts and opinions are not the same, and that ordinarily facts are much more useful than opinions. What is actually true is almost sure to have some significance; but somebody's thought about what may be true can have but little importance unless the somebody be an eminent authority. Hence any book or article which gives facts is likely to be an important source; but not necessarily so; for much writing is done under conditions of haste or by prejudiced authors, and for this reason will not stand thorough scrutiny. We know, for instance, that in the very nature of the case much newspaper writing must be less accurate and thorough than writing done for monthly or quarterly magazines; that many magazine articles are correspondingly less reliable than books, since books need not be published until their authors are absolutely sure of their facts. Then, too, the character of the periodical or publishing house concerned must be taken into account. Some editors and publishers have so good a reputation that

their name gives some assurance of the reliability of whatever they print, whereas others pursue no consistent policy, or are content with very low standards. Likewise, in consulting any work, it pays to investigate the author, in order to discover who he is and what his qualifications for writing really are. He may be a man who has devoted years to the study of the given subject, or he may be a man with no solid training at all, merely skilled in facile and plausible writing; he may be admirably fair-minded and free from entangling alliances, or he may be obviously affected by some personal interests or party affiliations. Similarly with works which contain ideas rather than facts. They also are very unequal in value. And anyone who goes to them for stimulus and guidance in his own writing must exercise all possible vigilance in detecting special bias or tricks of reasoning. The writer who searches for material in printed sources of any sort, then, must be just as strict in demanding soundness and interest in what he finds as he is in testing the availability of his own information and ideas. He must realize that appearance in print of itself guarantees nothing at all.

3. **From field work.** — Printed sources, occasionally, do not supply the necessary material. A writer may want to study some tendency in contemporary life which is too new to have been discussed much by others, or he may want to present a subject which is so close to human activities that the best material about it will come not from books but directly from people. Suppose, for instance, that he becomes interested in certain conditions which seem to threaten the health of his community, or in the attitude which his fellow citizens take toward child labor in his state. The best way, if not the only way, for him to gather material will be to go out into actual life. Thus the writer often becomes a field worker, observing characteristic scenes, interviewing influential men, mixing with all sorts of people and going into all sorts of places, working from house to house or shop to shop, perhaps traveling many miles from city to city or through the country, all in the endeavor to am-

plify and support his germ idea with facts. Nor is this field work any simple matter. The same accuracy, thoroughness, economy, and discrimination which mark the skillful use of printed sources are imperative here. But they are more difficult to attain, because of the active opposition which field investigators are likely to encounter and the confused or even contradictory facts which they are sure to gather. In addition to these things, too, the field worker must have abundant human sympathy and resourcefulness. As one editor has put it, the writer who depends on his efforts as a field investigator for his material must possess the knowledge and patience of the sociologist together with the human instinct of the newspaper man.

IV. GETTING MATERIAL FOR ÆSTHETIC COMPOSITION

For many students of composition it is much easier to find material for instrumental writing than for æsthetic writing. In the former, if the occasion does not supply or suggest the material, there are outside sources to aid one, or if need be, one can meet the demand by settling down to earnest thought. But in the latter, where the writing is not done to serve a definite practical end, mere industry or even sheer intellectual power avails but little. So it happens that many a young writer, upon learning the essentials of good material for æsthetic pieces, at once gives up hope of having anything worth while to say. Material of the right sort is, he thinks, altogether impossible for anyone without literary genius. There is poor chance, he is sure, of his getting an idea for a sketch or a story which would work up into anything of value. And yet those who are writing their impressions of life seem not to find material scarce. Quite the contrary. As one of them says, "Hope and the world are full; and he who drags into book-pages a phase or two of the great life of passion, of endurance, of love, of sorrow, is out wetting a feather, in the sea that breaks

ceaselessly along the great shore of the years. Every man's heart is a living drama; every death is a drop-scene; every book only a faint footlight to throw a little flicker on the stage. There is no need of wandering widely to catch incident or adventure: they are everywhere about us; each day is a succession of escapes and joys; — not perhaps clear to the world, but brooding in our thought, and living in our brain." [1] Indeed, nearly every professional writer has many more ideas jotted down in his notebook than he ever has time to work up. Nor does he consider it a particularly important part of whatever genius he may claim, that he can see plenty of things around him to write about.

Another erroneous idea about material for æsthetic composition is still more widely prevalent than the one just mentioned. Many writers, even some of maturity and experience, think that acceptable material is necessarily remote. If they live in a city, the country seems to offer no end of attractive possibilities; if they live in New England, then Texas or Italy or Japan seems to be the only place where life is at all interesting; if they live in comfortable quarters and among decent people, the slums and the underworld seem to abound with subjects for novels and dramas. Whatever it is, the life nearest them, the only life which they can really know, seems impossibly bare and unpromising. They think they must always reach far away for material that is true and interesting and adapted to their powers. But why? The experience of successful writers, of successful artists in general, is just the opposite. Lowell said, "The plowman runs his furrow through the most interesting museum in the world"; and that is typical of the way in which many other writers have made much of the life immediately around them. It was so with Shakespeare and the other Elizabethan dramatists; it was so with Jane Austen, Dickens, and Thackeray; it is so with the writers of our generation who command real power. They take people buying and selling, plowing and cooking, drinking and gambling, gossiping and flirting, singing

[1] Ik Marvel, *Dream Life*, Chap. I.

and praying, marrying and dying; men and women at work, children at play; the strong and the weak, the brave and the cowardly, the ambitious and the lazy, the honest and the treacherous, the gay and the sad; — they take life just as they find it near at hand and never search farther for the best material. As one of our present-day novelists says, "The more I travel, the more I find to interest me at home." Indeed, it may easily happen that the writer who is looking far away for his ideas has himself lived as good stories as any he could invent. It would seem, therefore, that the real essential in the matter of finding material for æsthetic composition is simply the ability to recognize the possibilities as they exist in life on every hand. As the shop phrase goes, the writer must have "an eye for copy."

A. The Eye for Copy

This precious faculty of picking the significant in one's experiences and impressions and imaginings implies at least three things. In the first place, the person who "sees copy" is thoroughly alive. He takes a full, fresh interest in the world about him. His powers of perception are so sensitive as to catch the fine, subtle effects of nature. He can enjoy the first delicate suggestions of spring as they come in March or April without waiting for the more evident pleasures of May and June. He finds peculiarly fascinating the moving shadows of a willow tree thrown by the sunset light on the wall of a house. He thrills at the slender curving of a reed by the river, or at the gray of some birds against the red of the sky. All his senses are keen, open, quick to record impressions. Similarly, he feels a deep interest in the ways of men. When he is on a train, instead of playing cards or reading a novel or sleeping to put in time, he is consumingly interested in the people about him — not in any unworthy way seeking to pry into their private affairs, of course, but watching them intently and following them in imagination to their shop or farm or office or home. He is not bored by what goes on around him anywhere, for he

likes life; it gives him new impressions, it stirs old associations, it fills him with ideas. He has the child's consuming interest in what is going on. As Mr. Arnold Bennett says, "The makers of literature are those who have seen and felt the miraculous interestingness of the universe. . . . Their lives are one long ecstasy of denying that the world is a dull place." Or, as Mr. Howells has put it, "The secret of the man who is universally interesting is that he is universally interested."

Probably no literary craftsman has felt this miraculous interestingness of the universe more than Robert Louis Stevenson. A familiar passage in his *Gossip on Romance* represents his attitude delightfully: "Some places speak distinctly. Certain dank gardens cry aloud for a murder; certain old houses demand to be haunted; certain coasts are set apart for shipwreck. Other spots again seem to abide their destiny, suggestive and impenetrable, 'miching mallecho'. The inn at Burford Bridge, with its arbours and green garden and silent, eddying river — though it is known already as the place where Keats wrote some of his *Endymion* and Nelson parted from his Emma — still seems to wait the coming of the appropriate legend. Within these ivied walls, behind these old green shutters, some further business smoulders, waiting for its hour. The old Hawes Inn at the Queen's Ferry makes a similar call upon my fancy. There it stands, apart from the town, beside the pier, in a climate of its own, half inland, half marine — in front, the ferry bubbling with the tide and the guardship swinging to her anchor; behind, the old garden with the trees. Americans seek it already for the sake of Lovel and Oldbuck, who dined there at the beginning of the *Antiquary*. But you need not tell me — that is not all; there is some story, unrecorded or not yet complete, which must express the meaning of that inn more fully. So it is with names and faces; so it is with incidents that are idle and inconclusive in themselves, and yet seem like the beginning of some quaint romance, which the all-careless author leaves untold. How many of these romances have we not seen determine at their birth; how many people have met

us with a look of meaning in their eye, and sunk at once into trivial acquaintances; to how many places have we not drawn near, with express intimations — 'here my destiny awaits me' — and we have but dined there and passed on! I have lived both at the Hawes and Burford in a perpetual flutter, on the heels, as it seemed, of some adventure that should justify the place; but though the feeling had me to bed at night and called me again at morning in one unbroken round of pleasure and suspense, nothing befell me in either worth remark. The man or the hour had not yet come; but some day, I think, a boat shall put off from the Queen's Ferry, fraught with a dear cargo, and some frosty night a horseman, on a tragic errand, rattle with his whip upon the green shutters of the inn at Burford."

Closely related to this attitude of eager interest in men and things is the power of human sympathy. Some people whose senses are keen, and who catch interesting impressions of life, can never get certain warm material lying close to the heart of humanity, because they themselves are too cold and hard and unimaginative. But the person with "the eye for copy" is both broad and deep in his sympathies. He feels with all sorts of people. Without being overwrought by sympathy he gets the other man's point of view; and so ideas come to him which are both true and interesting. For him the sight of a poorly clad old woman fumbling over the slot of a corner mail box and hesitating to let go of her letter, or of a ten-year-old standing in the post office gazing at the colored poster of a United States Army recruiting station, is quite enough to suggest a story or a sketch. He has an emotional nature so rich and fine that when he looks out on life he understands; for, as Carlyle once said, "a loving heart is the beginning of knowledge."

But the finding of ideas depends further upon the writer's thoughtfulness. No matter with what zest he takes life nor how warmly he sympathizes with his fellow men, unless he reflects upon what he sees and hears and feels, his material will have little definiteness and significance. He must clarify the impressions that come to him from every side and find some

meaning in the tangled threads of human experience. Out of the myriad sensations which may come to one in a large city, Mr. Matthews brought together a few which furnished him delightful material for *Vignettes of Manhattan.* Thackeray centered his thought on a few out of the many lines of London life and wove them together into *Vanity Fair*, a story full of meaning, one which gives a definite interpretation of life. Thus it is with any writer who has the genuine " eye for copy." He sees in the world of nature and in the affairs of men not only the picturesque, the amusing, the pathetic, the exciting, the monotonous, but also that which stimulates him to thought. As he sees the wicked prosper, the gifted fall, the innocent suffer, the young die, and the weak struggle under all manner of burdens, he wonders what life is all about. As he sees a brilliant man, crippled in his youth, radiate happiness from his chair, a woman reject a man of wealth to marry a poor artist, a family leave a comfortable home to go into some crude, undeveloped country, a man in high position destitute of any real friends, he struggles for some view of life which will explain all. Not that every writer has a carefully formulated philosophy of life or can answer the riddles of our human existence. But he does think seriously about the facts of life as he knows them; and out of his thinking come a few ideas definite enough and sincere enough for expression.

B. Developing Ideas

The observation and imagination which are essential to " seeing copy " are quite indispensable in the further step of developing the ideas for presentation. Writers rarely get their conceptions complete and ready for immediate expression, and if they attempt to put them on paper at once, the writing is likely to be bare and unconvincing. Ordinarily, they must enrich their material by close observation and sympathetic play of imagination. This is evident when one examines the first notes made by any master novelist or dramatist. It can

also be seen in a simple way by comparing the two little sketches which follow. The two ideas are equally good; but whereas in the former the writer has done little more than set down the original impression that came to him, the author of the other has made his subject alive, he has vitalized his material by filling in many concrete details. The one is thin, stiff, unreal, because of the poverty of imagination shown by the writer; the other is warm, natural, true enough to bring the "smile of recognition" to every reader's face, because of the writer's sharp eye for the characteristic details and his quickening imagination.

(1) A weary looking workingman in shabby clothes was standing in the drug store sorting over the stock of post cards. His rugged face was honest and kind, but he looked sad as he fumbled through the assortment of cards without finding any which seemed to fit his purpose. Finally, among those with tender inscriptions in tinsel, he found one and then another, and these he looked at again and again. They were highly colored, were embossed with gay flowers, and bore lonesome messages like many in the stores. Weeks before, the factory in his little town had shut down and he had been compelled to seek work elsewhere, so had come here to join the construction gang on the streets. These cards were to bear the weight of his great love, to express much that he did not know how to write, as well as to please the eye of the little girl who so eagerly watched for the coming of the rural mail wagon.[1]

(2) I was impatient and tired, for all day there had been a ceaseless and monotonous stream of customers, bent on checking more names from their Christmas lists. They rushed into my father's jewelry store, asked to see rings, vases, pins, or anything that a desperate mind on the day before Christmas could think of, and then bought or went elsewhere. But when a little old woman in black gently asked to see cuff links, I knew that the monotony was broken.

She seemed at first dazzled by the gold gleaming in the trays and reflecting the rays of the electric light above. But in a moment she recovered herself with a smile, adjusted her steel-rimmed spectacles upon her nose, and timidly picked up one of the cards. Her hands were thin, but knotted at the joints, and her finger tips showed the black traces of needle pricks. As she brought the links closer to her face, her eyes danced gayly behind her spectacles and the drooping lines about her mouth gave place to a multitude of kindly wrinkles that framed a smile of rare sweetness.

[1] A student's theme.

"A pair of cuff buttons for John for Christmas," she confided and beamed at me over the spectacles. "You see," she added a little wistfully, "he's had to wear an odd pair for nearly five years now."

I offered her another tray to choose from and her delight increased as she picked up card after card. As she looked, her black cape with its braid turning green fell open and showed her hard china-silk waist with a jet brooch at her throat.

"Do you think the pearl would look better than the gold?" she asked anxiously; and before I could form an answer she added, "Or would he like sets better than just the plain ones?"

I told her that the plain gold always looked well, but I could see that she looked longingly at the brighter links. With a sigh she finally laid down the garnets which had attracted her.

"Well," she said with another bright look, "I want the ones that will do John the most good. I guess I'll take these gold ones. Is this the price — a dollar and seventy-five cents?"

I told her yes, and wrapped the links in the neatest little box in the store, while she untied the corner of a clean, worn handkerchief and paid me in silver. She stopped at the door with the box tightly clutched in her left hand and drew her black fascinator over her smooth white hair and close under her chin. Then she turned to give me a warm little smile and was lost in the crowd.[1]

When the young student of composition asks how he can acquire the imagination necessary to the enrichment of the material with which his observations supply him, there is, unfortunately, little that can be said. So far as observation itself is concerned, we need only recall Carlyle's grim remark to a friend: "Suppose you and I promulgate a treatise next, 'How to see?' The old plan was to have a pair of eyes first of all, and then open them, and endeavor with your whole strength to look." Exactly! Observation is conscious looking; close, keen, tireless attention to the outside world. Imagination is more largely inborn and incommunicable, although anyone who has a degree of imaginative power can increase it with use. Certainly no one who instinctively notices little things in the world about him, and who, like the boy Tennyson, hears a voice calling in the wind, ought to feel ashamed of his tendencies and discourage

[1] A student's theme.

them. Without this observation and imagination there can be no literary fine art; and what is more, there can be no full enjoyment of living. Only he who looks out on his surroundings with the eye of an artist finds in life "a heightened picturesqueness, a constant wonder," an increased meaning; he adds "light and shadow to the monochrome of life."[1]

V. CARING FOR MATERIAL

Before we leave this matter of the writer's material, one other point deserves mention. It often occurs that an idea or some piece of information comes to a writer when he cannot make immediate use of it. He may be walking along the street, or riding in a train, or reading a book, without any thought of gathering material for a piece of writing. Indeed he may not know at the time of any specific use for the new idea. What, then, is he to do? Should he let pass the material which he has come upon thus happily, with the cheerful expectation of being able to find it again whenever he needs it? Not if he profits by the experiences of other craftsmen or by his own first embarrassments. For just as the painter records a face or a bit of landscape in his sketchbook, or a musician takes down a bird's song or some snatch of a folk melody, or a public lecturer files away a set of statistics or a telling epigram, so the wise writer seizes every bit of material which he thinks could have any possible value for him at any time and stores it up carefully. He realizes the economy that there is in this practice, for otherwise much time would be consumed in recovering the given material when needed, or in seeking for that which had been hopelessly lost. He realizes, too, that if he trusts to his memory to hold impressions or thoughts, it will retain only the larger points at best, whereas the right kind of notes will have a peculiarly rich suggestiveness. Lowell's playful suggestion to his friend Aldrich, therefore, has serious significance for everyone: "Always keep pencil and paper, as birdlime, at the head of your bed."

[1] The Daily Theme Eye, *Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 99, p. 427.

Just what means shall be used for storing material, every writer must, of course, determine for himself. It will depend largely on the nature of the material and the habits of the writer. It may be a diary, a journal, or marginal notes, for the more personal matter, and an indexed scrapbook or a set of labeled envelopes for clippings. More likely, in these days when careful classification and quick access to everything on file are required for common business efficiency, it will be some flexible system of cards and folders which will permit easy assimilation of new material, a simple shifting of material already filed, and ready reference to everything on hand. But the essential thing for every young writer to learn, whether his interests are in the field of informational or purely imaginative writing, is that he must reduce the wasting of material to a minimum. Every fact, every detail, every name, every quotation, every idea, which is true and seems at all interesting, ought to be cared for.

READINGS AND EXERCISES

1. In connection with our discussion of the writer's choice of material, you will find it interesting to read what Mr. Kenyon Cox says about "The Subject in Art" (Chapter II of *The Classic Point of View*. Charles Scribner's Sons).

2. Guy de Maupassant commented on the demands of truth in literary material thus: "The number of people who die every day in this world by accident is considerable. But can we make a tile fall on the head of a principal personage, or throw him under the wheels of a carriage, in the middle of a story, under the pretext that it is necessary to introduce an accident?" What makes incidents seem probable?

3. Cooper was intensely interested in the American Indian. Parkman was fascinated by the dramatic conflict of two great nations. Mr. Burroughs has a keen, even affectionate interest in the outdoor world. In your practice in writing are you equally wise in choosing material which lies close to your main interests?

4. Diderot tells of a poet who said about a fellow poet: "He will not go far. He has not found the secret. What secret? That of

describing objects of real interest: fathers, mothers, husbands, wives, children."

5. The *Writer* quotes Mr. Munsey, the editor, as follows: "In classifying elements of fiction according to commercial value, I rank pathos first, love second, adventure third, humor fourth. You can manufacture love plots and adventure, and, to some extent, humor, but you cannot manufacture pathos; it must come of itself." Do you think this position is well sustained?

6. Thackeray frankly recognized some of his own limitations in the selection of his material. In the preface of *Pendennis* he says: "The exciting plan [to have a ruffian in the story] was laid aside because, on attempting it, I found that I failed from want of xperience of my subject; and never having been intimate with any convict in my life, and the manner of ruffians and jailbirds being quite unfamiliar to me, the idea of entering into competition with M. Eugène Sue was abandoned." Do you know of any writer to-day who seems to have chosen material which he is not fitted to use?

7. Discuss the character of the material in the following themes. Does it satisfy the tests of good material in each case? Which material seems to have the greatest interest?

a. Why I should have thought of Hortense a moment since is more than I can say. Why is it that we often have such quaint thoughts immediately in the morning? Creeping in from another world they seem to come — transient, but while they are present, dominant over the very alarm clock with all its ill-timed clamor. Hortense came to me thus; Hortense, the little golden-haired, blue-eyed fairy whom I used to play with so long ago — Oh, so long ago!

Hortense, no other name, just Hortense. She moved away suddenly — that is, her parents did — and I never had seen her again; indeed, I had quite forgotten her, and for years before this morning had not given her a passing thought. But a moment ago I saw her. We were playing in the sand pile under the old crabapple tree, and she was laughing; her little white teeth glistened as she threw back her curls. The sun filtered down through the leaves and the pink-tinted fruit, and from time to time a sweet breeze from the direction of the garden filled our breasts with unconscious happiness. Her little gingham — blue it was — and my bare tanned legs; they were touches of color in the fleeting picture. She opened her lips to say something, but the lines of her face grew dim, and little Hortense was any one of a hundred other golden-haired, blue-eyed maidens I have met in my ramble down the checkered pathway of the years.

b. "Another hunky drownded in the pit."

It was a burly brakeman that made the announcement as he pulled off his greasy gloves and mopped his sweaty face.

No one in the little office stirred. Down the track only the consumptive cough of an engine going light to the roundhouse broke the quiet of a hot mid-August afternoon. The interchange clerk knocked the ashes from his pipe, placed it carefully in its case, and returned it to his pocket.

"When?" he queried as he readjusted the ink pad on the desk before him.

The brakeman had his nose in a dipper of ice water. Not until he had gulped down two dipperfuls and sighed deeply with satisfaction did he seem to give any thought to the question.

"Why, just now," he replied indifferently. "Went down the second time as I was goin' past."

I rushed from the office and sped down the path to the gravel pit. Surrounded by a curious crowd, a dozen half-naked Poles were working feverishly over a limp, wet body. Soon a doctor came. He roughly pushed the men aside, rolled the drowned man over on his back, thumped his chest, and opened his mouth. Then he shrugged his shoulders.

"No use," he said, "he's dead," and laughed as he strode to his buggy.

As I stumbled back to the yard office a great black mist came over the sun, and everything seemed cold and black and wrong.

"Did Mead go out with Timpe on Number Four?" the clerk asked without looking up, as I reached the office. I dropped into a chair without answering and stared out across the tracks.

c. My own thoughts were absorbing, and as I hurried down the street, I scarcely noticed the little group of children just ahead. Their eager laughter seemed only to belong to the general scheme of things, and not to be separated from the empty streets and the dusky twilight. In my mind I was counting up the remaining weeks of college and trying to figure where the last four years had gone, when a quick turn on the part of the children dashed me almost against them. Just in time I caught a small arm and steadied one of the boys who was about to fall. "Careful, little man," I admonished, "you pretty near had a tumble." I looked up to see what had caused the children to turn so suddenly and found myself gazing into a dingy shop window. Then, actuated by an impulse which I never took the trouble to explain, I followed the little group through the low doorway.

The first glance told me the cause of the eagerness and the hurry. Standing on tiptoe with noses against the glass of the show case stood four children, — three boys and a girl. In the case were rows of shallow trays filled with that variety of sweetmeats known as penny goods. I even recognized some old favorites of my own, such as marshmallow cigars and licorice babies. Gravely, and with a complete sense of the importance of the occasion, I

watched the choice of each as he clamored to be heard. The smallest one, a boy, could scarcely get his eyes on a level with the bottom of the case, but his call was none the less insistent.

"I want red drops. I want red drops," he urged, with tiny hand upstretched. Fascinated, I watched the little red disks disappear, leaving telltale streaks of scarlet across cheek and lips. Another demanded a stick of peppermint candy, while the girl, after retracting several decisions, decided on gum. There remained but one, evidently the oldest, and he was taking longest to consider. Up and down the case his eyes wandered, searching for what he wanted. His eyes rested several moments on the suspicious looking plug of licorice tobacco, but with a sigh he turned away.

"What do you get the most of for a cent?" he asked finally. Upon being shown the marshmallows his indecision vanished and into his hand four of the fluffy white squares were counted with momentous exactness. Then in the same helter-skelter manner all four tumbled out into the street again.

"What will you have, sir?"

I started up and met the inquiring gaze of the shopwoman. "Why — I — a —. How do you sell those apples?" I asked after I had allowed my eyes to wander hopelessly over the shelves of cans.

"The little ones are two for five, and the big ones five," the woman answered and rolled several of them out on the case. I chose the biggest one in sight and laid down a nickel.

"Strange," I thought as I too stepped out into the street, "that ten years ago I would have bought jelly beans and to-night I had to buy an apple."

d. Privates Tommy Burns and "Long Pete" Hogan, Massachusetts National Guard, crawled slowly from beneath a pile of rubbish. With chattering teeth and shivering limbs they gained their feet and surveyed the blackened ruins of the city. The fire had indeed left little.

Hogan kicked his erstwhile bed disdainfully. "Huh!" he growled, "No tents, no blankets, no grub since yesterday noon, no nuthin'."

"I'm hungry," Burns averred very simply but with emotion. "Don't you suppose we could find somethin' to eat?"

Hogan flung him a glance of extreme disgust. "Yes, probably," he snapped. "Charcoal, maybe, or a warm brick. You — but what's that?"

Ten feet away the rubbish was in a state of violent commotion. Slowly it fell apart and a small refugee pig from one of the cattle wharves strolled nonchalantly into view.

"A pig, by the holy Saint Patrick," squealed Hogan, his rifle springing involuntarily to his hip.

"Hold on," warned Burns, "do you want the guard down on us? Give him the baynit, you fool."

Cautiously, and with many endearing terms, the two soldiers approached their victim. But the pig, scenting danger in their too friendly actions, co-

quetted with them just out of reach, and finally took to his heels, followed by the two gleaming bayonets.

Straight down the street fled the pig, and Burns and Hogan pursued their elusive breakfast with single-minded intentness. On they went, stumbling over a sleeping soldier at nearly every step, and accumulating an uproarious following of breakfastless messmates.

But they were gaining. Now but a foot intervened between the pig and their bayonets — now only six inches. With a yell of triumph, Hogan hurled himself forward and impaled the pig right on top of a sleeper, who awoke bruised and swearing, while Burns stumbled over the heap and landed a full length beyond. In an instant, however, he had clambered to his feet to protect the spoils of war from the gathering crowd.

"I guess I spitted him nice now," gasped Hogan as he recovered himself and the pig. "Who's got —"

But he never finished his question. The sleeper upon whose body the last act of the tragedy had occurred confronted him with blazing eyes. It was the captain!

"Privates Burns and Hogan, you are under arrest," he said, and then called, "Frensen!"

"Yes, sir," shouted a tow-headed person, saluting.

"Cook this pig for my breakfast."

8. Jean Paul Richter once said, "Never read till you have thought yourself empty; never write till you have read yourself full." Just what did he mean by this advice? Do you agree with him?

9. Go to the college library and ask the librarian to point out some of the most reliable reference works. Find the distinctive features of each. By means of a test case, make sure that you can use these books readily.

10. When you begin to collect material from printed sources, you can often find a bibliography already prepared. Have you ever seen the bibliographies on special subjects which are issued by the Library of Congress? Examine some of them.

11. *The Writer* (Vol. 23, p. 166) tells what unusual efforts several authors have made to get complete information on their subjects before writing. Can you find in the prefaces of authoritative books any evidences of thoroughness in mastering sources?

12. How does material in *The Atlantic Monthly* differ from that in *McClure's?* in *Munsey's?* in *The Political Science Quarterly?* in *The Wall Street Journal?*

13. How can one learn about an author? What information is the title page likely to give? the preface or introduction? such

books as *Who's Who* and *Who's Who in America?* What magazines publish information about their contributors?

14. Do Emerson's *Journals* show that he had an abundance of material left over from his finished writings? What kind of material did he store up in these journals?

15. In *The House of Harper* we are told that Thomas Hardy's first conception of Tess was derived from a glimpse he had of a comely country lass sitting in the tail end of a cart which rumbled past him as he was strolling along the road. Her pretty face was so sad and appealing as it slowly disappeared from view that it haunted him many a day, and he evolved from this transient vision the story which has become an English classic. Can you see in this incident an illustration of the sensitiveness, the thoughtfulness, and the human sympathy which characterize the man with "an eye for copy"?

16. As a stimulus to closer observation read Sharp Eyes (in *Locusts and Wild Honey*) and The Art of Seeing Things (in *Leaf and Tendril*), by John Burroughs.

17. Hawthorne said: "I would advise you not to stick too accurately to the bare facts, either in your descriptions or your narratives; else your hand will be cramped, and the result will be a wane of freedom that will deprive you of a higher truth than that which you strive to attain. Allow your fancy pretty free license, and omit no heightening touches merely because they did not chance to happen before your eyes. If they did not happen, they at least ought — which is all that concerns you." What "higher truth" did he have in mind when he wrote this? Can you express clearly your own conception of this "higher truth"?

18. In *Representative Men* Emerson says of Goethe: "He has clothed our modern existence with poetry. Amid littleness and detail, he detected the Genius of life, the old cunning Proteus, nestling close beside us, and showed that the dullness and prose we ascribe to the age was only another of his masks: —

'His very flight is presence in disguise:'

— that he had put off a gay uniform for a fatigue dress, and was not a whit less vivacious or rich in Liverpool or the Hague than once in Rome or Antioch." Do you see the poetry of everyday life? Do you try?

CHAPTER III. — THE WRITER'S MEDIUM

I. THE CHARACTER OF A GOOD WORKING VOCABULARY

If a writer hopes to say effectively what he wants to say, he must possess an adequate working vocabulary. In the first place, it should express clearly the knowledge he has gained through experience and observation, — the so-called facts of life. Whether he is explaining the principle of an aëroplane, arguing against the recall of judges, describing a park full of children from the slums, or telling the story of a vacation spent in Saskatchewan, he must make his reader understand. Secondly, his vocabulary should reflect his own individuality. He must not only explain processes, argue propositions, describe objects, and recount action, but he must make the processes, the arguments, the objects, and the action significant and full of life and color by revealing his attitude toward the material he treats. Sometimes we meet persons whose comments on the most vital matters are expressed in the manner of algebraic formulas; to them, words are only conventional symbols to be used in treating "facts." Again we meet others who cannot explain anything thoroughly, who yet succeed in expressing their dislike or admiration for whatever they may be considering; to them, language is less conventional than personal. These two classes have vocabularies that are equally inadequate. It is true that language is conventional; words are rather rigid symbols which must have essentially the same meaning for writer and reader. But it is no less true that language is personal; words are not dead symbols, as we may see in the fact that writers who are equally clear produce wholly different impressions. The effective writer must combine the

conventional and the personal. In other words, he must make himself easily understood, and at the same time express the texture of his own character.

II. THE NEED OF IMPROVING THE VOCABULARY

The necessity of improving our vocabularies becomes evident as soon as we attempt to measure them by this twofold standard. Immediately we discover how impossible it is for us to express ourselves adequately. We can see the matter convincingly, perhaps, if we only remember that our reading vocabularies contain four or five times as many words as we use in writing and speaking.[1] That is to say, we possess a large fund of knowledge which is quite unavailable for constructive work. Moreover, much of the knowledge that we do use, though imperfectly, as well as the thinking we base upon it, remains indefinite and inaccurate for the simple reason that we have not developed a vocabulary commensurate with our needs. Evidence of this inadequacy we encounter every day. We are encountering it when we say, "I know fully what I mean, but when I say it, it doesn't suit me," or "The word doesn't quite express my meaning," or "I should never say it in that way." We are encountering a different kind of evidence on the same matter when in our reading we feel sure that the writer, though he be recognized as having skill, has in some cases weakened his effects by employing unpleasant or impotent words. Although we succeed in gaining his rough, unfinished meaning, we are sure that he did not say quite what he meant to say, and that because of his cramped vocabulary he was not altogether certain that he himself knew when he had expressed the content of his mind. Of course, our knowledge will, in a way, always run

[1] For several years the numerical strength of the "average man's" supply of words has been much discussed. Although it undoubtedly is not great, there is good reason to believe that it is greater than is generally supposed. Probably the average college freshman uses three or four thousand words. For an account of studies that the authors made for the purpose of determining the size of the working vocabulary, see the *Nation*, Vol. 93, pp. 11 and 262.

far ahead of our powers of expression; but as long as the part of our mental experience about which we can speak or write in only the most indefinite terms is large, we may be assured that there is still much need of improving our working vocabularies.

III. AIMS IN IMPROVING THE VOCABULARY

The desired twofold expressiveness of words is always reducible to what Professor Palmer has aptly called range and accuracy. Unless we have many words at command, we cannot write with any degree of effectiveness about some subjects in which we are genuinely interested. If we try to discuss those matters, we never quite make ourselves understood; and our readers smile the smile of pity. But it is not enough to have a wide vocabulary; the words we know must be made to serve us easily and fully. We must know them so well and have such a completely developed feeling for all their possible meanings that we shall not only say what we have to say, but know in advance just what kind of impression we are going to produce. In other words, we must feel a certain personal ownership in the language we write. If we do not, we shall always be lost when trying to make close discriminations in meaning; we shall be compelled either to deal in generalizations or to run the risk of falling into obvious misstatement. All around us we see the unhappy result. College men and women call every object merely a "thing" or a "business" or a "proposition"; attribute to every desirable experience, condition, or skill, the indefinite quality "clever," "good," or "nice"; and express all relations with "but," "and," and "so." Such vagueness, some one may say, indicates lack of thinking. Undeniably it does. It indicates that we neglect the highest kind of thinking, — "thinking thoughts out into words." And if we hope to convince others that we do not in reality suffer from a dearth of ideas, we must command our words well enough to express ourselves clearly, sharply, and interestingly; for words are the only body in which the spirit of thought can go forth.

IV. MEANS OF IMPROVING THE VOCABULARY

Can much of this richness of vocabulary be gained by conscious effort? Is it not true that most of the words we use freely come to us through unconscious assimilation? Yes. Undoubtedly the greater part of the word supply we have at the age of twenty has come to us as the direct result of a necessity created by experience. And it is likewise true that if we could by any rare good fortune be thrown into such a variety of personal experiences that we should be compelled to use new words every day, there would be comparatively little reason for attempting to improve our vocabularies by conscious effort. It would be delightfully profitable to come into contact with every object that might enforce upon us the use of any desirable new word. But for most of us, such a course is utterly impossible. If, then, we hope to make very substantial progress in developing our stock of words, it remains for us to supplement in some way the slow, unconscious assimilation that we usually regard as the natural means of improvement. We must experiment with meanings. We cannot employ words skillfully if we do not set about finding them until we think we have immediate need. The poor, colorless, jaded words perhaps will come without preliminary effort; but the strong words, the right words, will not. We must be all the time searching for them, so that in the day of need we shall have them ready.

Our own reasoning on this matter does not stand alone. Writers and speakers differing widely in their early experience as students have testified in favor of some kind of systematic increase of the working vocabulary. Let us hear two or three.

"About this time I met with an odd volume of the *Spectator*. It was the third. I had never before seen any of them. I bought it, read it over and over, and was much delighted with it. I thought the writing excellent, and wished, if possible, to imitate it. With this view I took some of the papers, and making short hints of the sentiment in each sentence, laid them by a few days, and then, without looking at the book, tried to com-

plete the papers again, by expressing each hinted sentiment at length, and as fully as it had been expressed before, in any suitable words that should come to hand. Then I compared my Spectator with the original, discovered some of my faults, and corrected them. But I found I wanted a stock of words, or a readiness in recollecting and using them, which I thought I should have acquired before that time if I had gone on making verses; since the continual occasion for words of the same import, but of different length, to suit the measure, or of different sound for the rime, would have laid me under a constant necessity of searching for variety, and also have tended to fix that variety in my mind, and make me master of it. Therefore I took some of the tales and turned them into verse; and, after a time, when I had pretty well forgotten the prose, turned them back again. I also sometimes jumbled my collections of hints into confusion, and after some weeks endeavored to reduce them into the best order, before I began to form the full sentences and complete the paper. This was to teach me method in the arrangement of thoughts. By comparing my work afterwards with the original, I discovered many faults and amended them; but I sometimes had the pleasure of fancying that, in certain particulars of small import, I had been lucky enough to improve the method or the language, and this encouraged me to think I might possibly in time come to be a tolerable English writer, of which I was extremely ambitious." [1]

"All through my boyhood and youth, I was known and pointed out for the pattern of an idler; and yet I was always busy on my own private end, which was to learn to write. I kept always two books in my pocket, one to read, one to write in. As I walked, my mind was busy fitting what I saw with appropriate words; when I sat by the roadside, I would either read, or a pencil and a penny version book would be in my hand, to note down the features of the scene or commemorate some halting stanzas. Thus I lived with words. And what I thus wrote was for no ulterior use; it was written conscientiously

[1] Franklin, *Autobiography*, p. 60 in the Gateway edition. American Book Company.

for practice. It was not so much that I wished to be an author (though I wished that too) as that I had vowed that I would learn to write. That was a proficiency that tempted me; and I practiced to acquire it, as men learn to whittle, in a wager with myself. Description was the principal field of my exercise; for to anyone with senses there is always something worth describing, and town and country are but one continuous subject. But I worked in other ways also; often accompanied my walks with dramatic dialogues, in which I played many parts; and often exercised myself in writing down conversations from memory."[1]

Théophile Gautier, the French writer, not only studied the dictionary, from which he compiled lists of words and descriptive phrases that promised to be valuable to him later, but he collected striking words from every source and made them into a working dictionary of his own. One of his biographers has said concerning the method and its result: "His 'dictionary' was of inconceivable richness; not a word escaped him. In his reading, which included nearly all the works of French literature since the Renaissance, he had collected expressive words that had fallen into disuse, — words scarcely known to the learned, and quite unknown to people generally. These he revived and restored to their right to be used in the world of letters through his own ability to use them with appropriateness and sagacity."[2]

It is an equally significant fact that when fifty other writers, all of them living and writing in America to-day, were asked about means of increasing the vocabulary, more than half of them replied that they had at some time enlarged and improved their stock of ready words by systematic study and practice.

Some one may suggest, however, that the means must be far away. Not at all. In truth, they are so simple and so near at hand that we are likely to look beyond them. If we could only acquire new words by climbing a high mountain, or by paying

[1] Stevenson, *A College Magazine*.

[2] Maxime du Camp, *Théophile Gautier*, p. 136.

a large sum of money, or by submitting to severe punishment of some sort, every one of us who is interested in learning to write would be well supplied in a short while. But since this most happy end may be reached by very simple methods of study and practice, — means which surround us all the days of our lives, — we famish in our self-imposed weakness while we look in amazement at the power which others have developed by the very methods we ignore. It is not possible, of course, to offer a general prescription that will supply all individual needs; everyone must study his own case and find aids that are especially helpful to him. Yet all of us can profit by the suggestions in the following paragraphs.

A. Systematic Study

1. **The perusal of the dictionary.** — Of the means which may be regarded primarily as study rather than practice, the most obvious is the habitual perusal of the dictionary. The first step in the mastery of a word is to make its acquaintance, and the classifications and cross references of the present-day dictionary enable us to make this preliminary step with comparative ease. And we should not allow any carping pessimist by crying out, " Oh words, words, words ! " to prevent us from improving ourselves in this supposedly incoherent way. We are getting not merely words, but the ideas for which they stand. " A word is a vehicle, a boat floating down from the past, laden with the thought of men we never saw; and in coming to understand it we enter not only into the minds of our contemporaries, but into the general mind of humanity continuous through time. The popular notion of learning to speak is that the child first has the idea and then gets from others a sound to use in communicating it; but a closer study shows that this is hardly true even of the simplest ideas, and is nearly the reverse of truth as regards developed thought. In that the word usually goes before, leading and kindling the idea — we should not have the latter if we did not have the word first. ' This way,' says the

word, 'is an interesting thought; come and find it.' And so we are led on to rediscover old knowledge. Such words, for instance, as good, right, truth, love, home, justice, beauty, freedom, are powerful makers of what they stand for." [1]

Now much of this abundant life is preserved in a good dictionary. There we learn not only the bald definition of the word, but its spellings, its pronunciation, its derivation, the variety of meanings that it now has or has had, its synonyms, and its correct use in sentences. Moreover, in some of these ways, or in an explicit statement, we learn whether it is in good literary standing, — whether it is a word that enjoys good company, or is out of date, or is too new to be used with assurance, or is so slangy that it offends good taste. In short, as a result of this study we know much of the real life that a word has lived.

2. **The translation of foreign languages.** — Equally important is the study of foreign languages. To-day there is much discussion of the value of languages as a means of "discipline." However that question may be settled, it will remain true that if all other opportunities are equal, the student who devotes a part of his time to translation will have a better English vocabulary than the one who does not. In the first place, such practice is valuable because it compels us to bring our words into use. Idioms that have no exact parallel in our own language must be expressed faithfully; and in order to find means, we must search every corner of our vocabulary. Again, the spirit of other peoples, and perhaps of other times, must be expressed in the English of to-day; and this task, too, involves the most careful examination of our own supply of words. Furthermore, in our study of a foreign language we are compelled to pass over the lines slowly, and in translating we hold our English words in mind until we weigh them, one by one, and decide upon those which most perfectly express the foreign writer's meaning. Thus not only the foreign words, but their English equivalents as well, are deeply impressed upon us. But there is still another advantage. Our study of the foreign tongue is sure to acquaint

[1] Charles H. Cooley, *Social Organization*, p. 69. Charles Scribner's Sons.

us with the derivation of many English words, and thus not only increase the size of our vocabularies, but also suggest new meanings for words that we already use. That is to say, we are helped toward the mastery that enables us to make our words full of life. Hear Lowell in his address on *The Study of Modern Languages:*

"In reading such books as chiefly deserve to be read in any foreign language, it is wise to translate consciously and in words as we read. There is no such help to a fuller mastery of our vernacular. It compels us to such a choosing and testing, to so nice a discrimination of sound, propriety, position, and shade of meaning, that we now first learn the secret of the words we have been using or misusing all our lives, and are gradually made aware that to set forth even the plainest matter, as it should be set forth, is not only a very difficult thing, calling for thought and practice, but an affair of conscience as well."

3. **The study of Old and Middle English texts.** — Virtually all the benefits that may be derived from the study of foreign languages are to be found in a study of Old and Middle English. They are as far removed from us as are some of the foreign languages we study, they give us first-hand knowledge of the history of words, increase the range of our vocabularies by acquainting us with word relations and word formations in our own language, and, because of the changes many words have undergone in the past eight or ten centuries, give color and flavor to words that we know familiarly, but nearly always use thoughtlessly. Moreover, in study of this kind, we learn the history of English idioms, and thereby develop a feeling for words as they stand naturally in a phrase. We learn, too, by seeing how certain tendencies in the language have persisted for centuries, just why some characteristics of the national vocabulary must be respected by the writer to-day. The value of this study of the texts themselves is always increased distinctly by the reading of books like Greenough and Kittredge's *Words and Their Ways in English Speech*, Krapp's *Modern English*, Jespersen's *Growth and Structure of the English Language*, and parts of

Emerson's *History of the English Language*. Let us not fear that any supposedly unpractical knowledge of the language of our early ancestors will overburden us with "scholarship" — or fill our writing with the phrase of the pedant. The poise that comes from such knowledge is the surest safeguard against looseness of speech.

4. **The study of standard writers and speakers.** — Another method that is used successfully by a large number of persons is the close study of effective speakers and writers of our own time. It is to be commended chiefly for two reasons: it is easy to carry into execution, and it is a kind of study in which we most nearly approach the unconscious assimilation that results from living continuously in the atmosphere of good English. Merely by listening attentively to a good speaker we catch some of his feeling for words; and feeling is ultimately a better guide to follow than any formal, dictionary standard. In reading there is a similar opportunity. We shall increase the influence of our reading, too, if we read carefully every line and every word on the page. It is true that circumstances sometimes make it necessary for us to do much reading hastily. But if we desire to increase our working vocabularies by seeing how others have used words effectively, we must spend enough time in the process really to see. The full meaning of a word cannot come to us if we are hastening rapidly by. We should, then, do at least a part of our reading with easy, comfortable deliberation. When we come upon a word that we do not know or only half know, let us pause long enough to become somewhat acquainted with it. If possible, we should read aloud, in order that the words may be impressed upon our memory through hearing as well as through seeing. Furthermore, the good effect of our reading is sure to be increased if we memorize from time to time some passages that are especially well expressed. Every book we read ought to give us some expressive words to add to our own stock. And if we but take the trouble to mark these words and bring them together on a slip of paper or the flyleaf of the book, we shall find that they are more

numerous and more interesting than we had ever believed. Here is a list which a student made while reading Professor Palmer's address on *Self-Cultivation in English: Fecundity, caprice, compeers, severities, disparagement, vivacious, subtle, perversity, cudgel, debilitate, isolate, docility, compendious, volition, precepts, subsidiary, linguistic.* Some of these words were not unknown to him, but all of them were outside his working vocabulary. How many of them are in yours?

B. Practice

Systematic study, however, is most fruitful only when it is carried over into systematic practice. Using a word is a much surer means of fixing it in mind than merely discovering that it is worth using. Many kinds of practice, according to one's preferences, may be employed daily.

1. **The characterization of familiar objects.** — One of these consists in characterizing familiar objects, sensations, persons, and stories. Small children, it is universally known, indulge in this practice with the utmost liberty, and frequently with embarrassing results for their older associates. But we adults need not offend anyone in order to test our skill in this respect. Perhaps we may choose to make the entire method a private one, to be used solely as a means of self-expression and not of communication. But, however that may be, we can rest in the assurance that in carrying on the practice we are not only focusing our powers of thought in the given instance, but are making less difficult the communication of thought in an indefinite number of other instances. For example, we shall soon refuse to content ourselves with a vague, incomplete notion of a book, when by a little thought and a little effort at expression we might find it crude, conventional, direct, clear, lucid, vague, caustic, definite, stilted, sympathetic, sincere, superficial, analytical, puzzling, prosy, blunt, convincing, bright, firm, faltering, refreshing, feeble, or vigorous.

2. **The defining of familiar terms.** — A similarly beneficial

practice is that of defining familiar terms. In fact, it would be difficult to discover a surer remedy for inaccuracy. Let us make the test. How many of us could give at the first attempt a reasonably adequate definition of *college*, *university*, *sociology*, *agriculture*, *motorcycle*, *moving picture*, *translation?* An adequate definition, it should be remembered, requires complete identification; complete identification requires distinctions; and distinctions are impossible unless we use words with accuracy. Every serious attempt at definition is, then, a step toward a more serviceable vocabulary.

3. **Adapting the same subject-matter to different audiences.** — Another kind of practice which many writers have found helpful consists in adapting the same subject-matter to the understanding or taste of different people. For example, if we are discussing fraternities or college clubs with an old man who never attended college, we must be much more explicit than we should find it necessary to be if we were talking to some of our classmates. As a result of the former's meager knowledge, we are required not only to explain conditions, but to explain the very terms we use. If we do not, we shall confuse and disappoint him. He will be asking all the while, What is that? What do you mean? How am I to understand that? A listener's facial expression, his interest or indifference, and his mild protests or frank words of approval always guide us in making ourselves easily understood. We are influenced, too, by our own attitude of personal respect for the one with whom we talk. For instance, if a freshman spends an evening with the college president, the occasion doubtless brings a seriousness and dignity to his speech that is very noticeably lacking ordinarily. And herein lies one of the great values of conversation as a means of increasing our skill in writing. As we more or less unconsciously lend ourselves to the task of making it impossible for any of our listeners to misunderstand either our thought or our attitude, we are stimulated to employ many words that for months, perhaps, have remained unused in the dusty corners of consciousness. When we are

writing we are without this personal presence of the listener, but if we keep him clearly in mind, we shall derive much of the benefit that is to be found in conversation. If anybody doubts the efficacy of the practice, let him try to write a letter on the same subject to a former teacher, his mother, his older sister, his eight-year old brother, and a school chum who went to another college.

4. **The deliberate use of newly found words.** — The best kind of practice, however, is the deliberate using of new words encountered in any kind of study or experience. To some this may seem an artificial and over-businesslike way of going about the task; but if we bear in mind that the first purpose of all effort toward a serviceable vocabulary is to have words in readiness, we shall probably not question any method which promises this desirable result. Anything that helps to establish a word in our mental experience merits consideration. And there can be no doubt that writing a word repeatedly in a normal context, though done as mere exercise, will go far toward making it such a definite part of our mental possessions that we shall soon use it easily and naturally. Anyone who possesses enough will power to follow the plan of using two or three new words each week will be surprised to find how easily the words are learned and how soon they become firmly established in one's mind.

5. **Other kinds of practice.** — Of course, there are many other kinds of helpful practice. Not a few earnest writers, regardless of their interest or lack of interest in poetry, have profited by the more or less regular writing of verse. The demand for words that will at the same time meet the requirements of the writer's meaning and the given meter calls into service every part of his vocabulary. This method, we remember, was followed by Franklin. Again, many who have neither the time nor the inclination to write verse will find it worth while to keep new words on a card and glance at them occasionally; or, what is still better, keep them conspicuously posted over the study table where they may be seen without

effort. Others have found, too, that it is profitable to make lists of the words they repeat too frequently, and then in spare moments to master fresh synonyms of these. All of these practices, like the others we have considered, are worth trying. If some of us find that we do not like any of them as well as some means we have ourselves discovered, very well. There is no monopoly on helps of this kind. The matter of importance is that we should use the method at hand, however matter-of-fact and tedious it may seem. The magic is not in the method, but in the artist's curiosity which sees in very ordinary procedure an opportunity to rise to self-mastery and self-dependence.

V. THE WRITER'S USE OF WORDS

The mere presence of words in our mental storehouse is very essential; but this does not afford us a very certain guarantee that we shall be able to express ourselves well. Even the most serviceable vocabulary contains words that we do not desire to use at all. Uninvited these have found their way along with those which more certainly reflect our knowledge and our spirit. Others have gained place, no doubt, because at one time we took pride in the mastery of a kind of expression we no longer admire. Probably we may be glad to know these, but we should feel deeply humiliated if we believed they were expressive of the dominant spirit of our lives. Moreover, it is necessary to have at hand many other words which we use only on extraordinary occasions, or when treating matters that rarely demand our attention. Now when all these less acceptable or less serviceable words are associated in our minds with the many others that we regard as serving our purposes, it is evident that we must exercise care in choosing. Sometimes it is necessary to choose between the good and the bad; sometimes, between the good and the better; and sometimes, between those which seem to be almost equally good.

A. The Exclusion of Words not Sanctioned by Good Judgment

The skillful use of words, therefore, is chiefly a matter of good judgment. Few words are inherently bad; we cannot say of very many that they should never be employed. It is true that we sometimes see rigid classifications of "good English" and "bad English," but they are so artificial and so thoroughly antagonistic to the very nature of the words in a living language, that they afford little help and often result in much confusion. It is better to look upon words as we look upon people: some are for intimate friendship, others for pleasant acquaintance, others for business association, and still others for the merest formality that exists between persons whose interests are widely different, but whose lives are occasionally brought together in some passing relation. We are not to look upon one word as being just as good as another. Steadily we push some farther and farther into the background until we rarely, if ever, are prompted to use them. Others do not so nearly approach disappearance, yet we exclude them from habitual use. But they are not excluded because somebody has said arbitrarily that they ought to be; they are excluded because they are not well suited to perform service in the most usual kinds of communication. Virtually all these words fall under two heads: (1) those not understood or misunderstood; (2) those likely to make an unfavorable impression.

1. **Words not understood or misunderstood.** — In this first class, the ones that probably require least attention are those that have passed from active service in the language and those that have not yet gained full currency. The smallness of the degree of danger from the first of these arises from the fact that we are not likely to use many obsolete words under any circumstances. Occasionally in our reading of Chaucer or Spenser or Shakespeare we form a working acquaintance with such words as *withsay*, *kine*, *in sooth*, *micel*, *mayhap*, *affray* (verb), *bote*, *chapman*, *dight*, *cousinage*, *ilke*, *albeit*, and *yclept;* and if we do,

we must not hope to have readers in general understand us when we employ them. But words of this class really do not require much attention. With the new words, the case is different in kind but not in degree. When newness is the only objection that can be made, a word must be very new, indeed, if it is not generally understood. If it is expressive, it is scarcely off the tongue for the first time before it is hurried by telegraph, fast mail, rural delivery, and telephone to every corner of the country. Who, for example, does not know the meaning of *aviate* and *biplane*, although the sport which brought them into use is now less than a half dozen years old? There is good reason why words that are too new should be used with caution: they may not, in truth, be generally known, and even if they are known, their meanings may be indefinite or variable. Still, as has been said before, the danger is never very great.

Perhaps our attitude toward foreign words should be a little more definite. In our study of languages, in our reading of the English literature that was written when the classics were more zealously quoted than they are to-day, and in our travel in foreign countries, we have become acquainted with many words that stay in the memory; and we sometimes fall into the habit of using them as a substitute for English. Or it may be that we take the least degree of pride in using them, since they seem to reveal some breadth of learning. On the contrary, they reveal an absence of good taste, the surest mark of real learning, inasmuch as they usually result in some one's confusion or displeasure. To-day a page that abounds with italicized foreign words is regarded as either pedantic or flippant. Of course, if a foreign phrase which is probably familiar to our readers expresses our meaning better than we could express it in our own tongue, we should not hesitate to use the more exact phrase. In general, however, the practice is as unnecessary as it is inexpedient. He who can find pure English equivalents for *affaire de cœur*, *en gros*, *l'amour propre*, *sang froid*, *ab initio*, *in statu quo*, *multum in parvo*, *rara avis*, *salus populi*, *vis-a-vis*, *les savans*, *cul de sac*, *beau monde*, and the like, is almost certain

to be more perfectly understood and more convincing than he who unfortunately believes that we study foreign languages in order to bring fragments of them into our English speech and writing.

Technical words are more troublesome, because everyone uses the terminology of some field of technical study, some profession, or some trade. In other words, every person possesses a technical vocabulary, although he may not always be aware of the fact. From early youth, perhaps, we have heard the words that belong to the calling or occupation of some member of the family or some friend. These words have slowly become so firmly established in our minds that it may never occur to us that they are almost meaningless to many who will read what we write. *Corymb*, *involute*, *diadelphous*, *tort*, *lien*, *garnishee*, *box-head*, *upper case*, *prophylactic*, *blind entry*, and *bone coal* are very simple terms to those who are familiar with botany, law, printing, medicine, and coal mining; and when they are addressed to readers who are acquainted with these subjects, they are simpler and clearer than any phrases that might be substituted for them. To the lay reader, however, they are but empty words. If we address them to him, we invite misunderstanding and antagonism.

Words of one other class should be excluded from general use because they are likely to be misunderstood. These are what we ordinarily call "localisms" or "provincialisms." They are used freely and are thoroughly understood in some one community or section of the country, but have no general or national circulation. Most of us encounter more difficulty in exercising good judgment concerning these words than any other kind, since they have, even to a greater degree than the technical or trade words, become a part of our everyday lives. That is to say, they have become so much a part of us that we are blissfully unaware that their circulation is restricted to our locality. Of course, if we are writing a narrative meant to have local color, these words may be very serviceable. In other kinds of writing, however, they should be used cautiously.

He who uses them has no assurance that they will be understood. For example, it is very doubtful whether many readers of this page will know all the words in the following short list, although all of them are used freely in one small part of a state in the Middle West: *Hornswaggle*, *wampus*, *lollygag*, *sundowner*, *tacky*, *roust*, *loblolly*, *jimmy-slinger*, *nicker*, *lunker*, and *coping*. When we remember that each one of us is acquainted with expressions of equally narrow circulation, many of which are less likely to remind us of their local character than these few, the need of care becomes fully evident.

2. **Words likely to make an unfavorable impression.** — Words that are in danger of being wrongly understood, it scarcely need be said, are certain to be received unfavorably because of the confusion they produce. Some words, however, make an unfavorable impression in spite of the fact that they are understood. In truth, the very ease with which their vague, indefinite, or lifeless meaning is grasped explains the sureness with which they perpetuate themselves in the vocabularies of many writers.

Slang words are undoubtedly the most troublesome of this class. They are not to be condemned, however, simply because they are slang, — because they are outside the realm of literary usage, — for anyone who is familiar with the ways in which a language increases is aware of the fact that some of these words are all the while growing into good standing. Many of our most expressive words to-day were only a century or two ago a part of the slang of the hour. Yet, in spite of this fact, if we have genuine regard for our audience, we cannot often risk words of this kind. Essentially, they are arbitrary and conventional in significance, their history frequently gives them an unpleasant or inelegant connotation, and they are used the most freely by persons whose mental activities are superficial and flippant. Assuredly, if we are content to have people of this class alone for an audience, we may revel in slang with some degree of impunity; but if we desire to influence serious people, we must speak a language that ordinarily reflects thoughtfulness and sobriety.

A further reason why we should not use slang is that words of this class are so inclusive in their meaning that the person who uses them is not required to make close distinctions of any kind. All disagreeable men, regardless of the different qualities which make them disagreeable, are *roughnecks* or *ginks;* all unsophisticated persons of whatever kind are *fall-guys;* all things whatsoever that are acquired stealthily, dishonestly, or with incredible skill are *faked;* every kind of desirable information is *dope;* and every person who succeeds in an enterprise, whether it be a football game or an evasion of the state law, *gets by.* A few dozen words of this kind are made a lifeless, jellylike substitute for a vigorous, substantial vocabulary.

Vulgarisms constitute another class of words which we ought not to use freely. It should be remembered, however, that the term "vulgarism" is very frequently misunderstood and misused. It is not an exact synonym for "vulgarity," since it does not usually connote coarseness or indecency. Nor does it include the sturdy, homely words that the purist sometimes refuses to sanction because they do not seem "literary." As its derivation will help to make clear, it is a name applied to a word which is in common use. The unfavorable suggestion made by words of this kind arises from the fact that they have become commonplace. They are for that reason without the good standing necessary to produce an agreeable impression upon persons of good taste. Since they are continually changing their standing, very frequently climbing up to the rank of acceptable colloquial usage, and quite often to the dignity of good literary expression, it is difficult to name specific words that are representative of the entire class; but the ones which follow are perhaps typical: *Gents*, *someplace* (for somewhere), *no good*, *raise* (rear, as applied to children), *complected*, *deal* (for transaction), *nowhere near* (not nearly), *posted* (informed), *go in for*, *ain't*, *hain't*, *party* (person), *disremember.* Exception may be taken to this list next year, or even by the time this page is in print; but some of the words may still suggest the character of the class to which they to-day belong.

Other words likely to produce an unfavorable impression upon our readers are legitimate colloquialisms. We are frequently reminded, and with justification, that we should make use of our conversation in improving our writing. Yet when our writing is influenced too habitually by our everyday speech, the result is not desirable. This remains true even in the case of those who converse with the utmost skill; for, as we have observed before, there is an essential difference between speaking and writing. Though we say that our writing ought to be as free and natural as our talking, it ought not to be so unless we talk in an unusually stiff, over-dignified, bookish way, or write with a loose freedom for the express purpose of gaining a colloquial flavor. The physical presence of the speaker gives proper color and tone to many words and contractions which would seem lifeless and flat, or careless, if they stood unsupported on the written or printed page. Words written must be fuller and richer and of greater dignity than words spoken. Thus we accept without much protest such contractions as *I'd*, *I'll*, *don't*, *won't*, *he'll*, and *they'll* when used with grammatical correctness, and such clipped forms and everyday words as *phone*, *taxi*, *math*, *folks*, *peek* (verb), *lots* (many or much), and *size up*, when they are used in speech; but we should become weary of them if they constituted the body of many consecutive paragraphs of writing. They are perfectly intelligible, but they do not suit the tone of the more formal, more serious writing.

Inasmuch as it is one of the vain ambitions of youth to make plain, ordinary matters important by clothing them in florid, pompous, or solemn words, the young writer will be safer if he excludes such words from general use. The occasions when they may be employed fittingly are so few that we do not need them in daily practice. Note the absurdity of the following sentences:

I hope from nethermost heart-depths that to you both as well-proven friends of lang-syne the 1911th twelvemonth may superabound with multiplied and multiform felicities. May every note in the gamut of human happiness prove richly resonant, filling the successive days with a music that soothes a soul and cheers a heart and originates within a semidiaphanous veil.

Many such words, as well as many others that are not noticeably florid or pompous or solemn, meet with such favor that they are used until they become lifeless. They are hackneyed, ridden to death. A newspaper writer, unknown to the authors, has presented the matter thus:

THE LITERARY HACK

He was a writer, and he learned
  The art "in all its phases,"
Of using well-known synonyms,
  And penning hackney phrases.
"Conspicuous by his absence" was
  Another standby, too,
A maiden had "a willowy form,"
  And "hair of golden hue."
He followed on "with bated breath,"
  "So near and yet so far,"
"An eagle glance," "magnetic gaze,"
  "The moaning of the bar;"
"A sight to make the angels weep,"
  "The human form divine,"
"Dilating nostrils," "flowing locks,"
  "And all the muses nine."
"The inner man," "last but not least,"
  "A few well-chosen words,"
"The mellow moon" and "twinkling stars,"
  And "little twittering birds,"
"Arch smile," and "lips of rosy tint,"
  "A dainty gloved hand,"
And "succulent bivalve," of course,
  Was always in demand.
To "philosophic heights" he'd rise,
  "Of reason chew the cud,"
And never once did he forget
  To write of "sickening thud."

Others that might be added just now are *strenuous*, *bountiful repast*, *dainty refreshments*, *divine* (a preacher), *hymeneal altar*, *toothsome viands*, *along these lines*, *a long-felt want*, *every walk of life*, and *safe and sane*. Of course, some students may protest

that they have not used these expressions habitually; and their protest may be well founded. What is conventional and worn and lifeless for one person may seem very fresh and expressive for another. It is not unreasonable to suppose that many words are comparatively new to young men and women of twenty, yet old and worn-out to readers who are thirty or forty. The only safe course for the young writer to pursue lies in observing carefully the words and phrases which are used excessively by others, and avoiding them in his own writing. If he couples this practice with a genuine effort to express his meaning accurately, closely, and in keeping with his individuality, he will eventually gain reasonable freedom from the fault. The only safety lies in habitual thoughtfulness.

Already it may seem that the words which we must exclude from our working vocabularies or use only with extreme care have become discouragingly numerous; yet one other class must be added. This consists of words which are in process of degeneration. If we but recall the early meaning of *villain*, *wench*, *knave*, *hussy*, *crafty*, *sly*, or *cunning*, and compare it with the present-day meaning, we cannot fail to see the downward career the word has followed. This process, often illustrated in the past, is going on in the language to-day, just as steadily and perhaps more rapidly. To mention only three or four examples, *lady-friend*, *innocent*, *pious*, and *guileless* are undergoing this change; and in a less pronounced way, *lady*, *fellow*, *worthy*, *parlor* (undertaker and palmist), and *artist* (tonsorial). Just as it is dangerous for us to be seen frequently in the company of persons who are losing their social or moral standing, so it is dangerous for us habitually to use words that are undergoing a similar degradation. If we are not aware of our condition, — if we know nothing of the questionable reputation that a word has acquired, — we are laughed at, and our readers refuse to take us seriously. On the other hand, if we use the word freely in defiance of established opinion, our readers assume that since we have chosen with full knowledge, we are merely finding our own literary level. Thus, whether or not we use words of this

class accurately and with honest intent, we are likely to create a bad impression.

B. The Selection of Words

1. **Kinds of words: A false basis of choice.** — When the student of composition turns from the exclusion of words to the constructive side of the process, — the selection of words from among those which remain in the foreground after the more undesirable ones are pushed aside, — he is usually perplexed by a number of classifications that seem in some way to be related to the fundamental principles upon which he ought to base his choice. For instance, all of us have doubtless heard many discussions of the effects produced by long words or short ones. Or we may have formed the mistaken notion that specific words are always better than general ones; for example, that the relatively specific words *chat*, *chatter*, *affirm*, *declare*, *declaim*, and *announce* for some reason should be preferred to the general term *speak;* or that *fiction*, *lyric*, *drama*, *sonnet*, *essay*, and *biography* should be preferred to the general word *literature.* Likewise we have no doubt become familiar with the division of all words into the classes "learned" and "popular." This classification is based on the fact that our acquaintance with words is of many degrees of familiarity, and that there is a more or less definite line of demarcation between the words we have always known and those we have learned from books or from the addresses and conversation of well-educated men and women. Thus in the following pairs it will readily be seen that in each case one word is more familiar to us than the other: *care, solicitude; choice, predilection; bright, resplendent; crooked, tortuous; thin, emaciated; beggar, mendicant; greedy, mercenary; harmful, deleterious; rot, putrefy; uproar, turbulence.*[1] Or again, we may have come to believe that Saxon words should always be preferred to words of Latin origin. It is likely that

[1] The authors are indebted to Greenough and Kittredge's *Words and their Ways* for this list and the one that appears at the end of the paragraph.

many of us have heard appeals to race "patriotism" in behalf of the words of our Teutonic fathers. As a result of such appeals, and through an imperfect understanding of the character of our language, we may have come to believe that in such pairs as the following, the first word of each pair should be chosen because of its Anglo-Saxon origin: *dear, valuable; doorkeeper, janitor; earnings, remuneration; empty, vacant; fight, conflict; fit, appropriate; ghost, specter; great, magnificent; hallowed, consecrated; hopeless, desperate; likeness, similarity; mood, disposition; short, concise; slack, lax; teach, instruct; wonder, admiration.*

A little careful thought will bring us to see that although these classifications are very convenient in carrying on language study, they would make very artificial bases of choice in the real work of writing. Thus usually we find that many matters are of more consequence than the length of words. It is true that when a short word and a long one meet equally well the requirements of the context, mere length may serve as a basis of choice. But such cases are comparatively few. In prose, the length of a word is usually a matter of secondary importance.

Likewise we find that specific words are not inherently any better than general words. If we are writing exposition or argument, if we are treating principles and theories, or if for any other reason we desire to speak comprehensively rather than particularly, we must, if we hope to make any progress, use general terms. In using them we economize time, space, and, frequently, the good humor of our readers. It is true that students ordinarily need much more practice in the use of specific words than in the use of general ones; but the need arises from the fact that they are habitually trying to make general terms express concrete matters, and not from the supposed fact that all general words are "bad English."

Neither can we rely wholly upon "learned" and "popular" as a basis of choice. It is true that we have more occasions to use the popular words, and that since we are better acquainted with them than with learned terms, they are likely to express our

meaning more accurately. But on some occasions we may desire to use words that are dignified and lofty for the very reason that they are not parts of everyday speech; the tone of our subject may demand them. Furthermore, this classification is inadequate because there is no definite standard of the learnedness or popularity of a word. Words that are popular for Jones may be learned for Smith. Consequently, when we try to make these terms express a principle of choice, we are not only reducing the selection of words to an impossibly simple division, but we are using a division that to a certain extent has a different meaning for everyone who uses the language.

Nor can we say with justification that choice should be determined by the origin of the word. Obviously, Anglo-Saxon words are more numerous in our vocabulary than words of Latin origin. But the simple fact that Latin words are as numerous as they are is proof sufficient that we need them in our speaking and writing. In fact, they have become so thoroughly a part of the language that the old assertion that words of Latin origin were not used commonly has long since ceased to be true. Naturally, the larger portion of our everyday speech is Saxon, but the familiar presence of such Latin words as *animal*, *anxious*, *auction*, *circus*, *contract*, *correct*, *curve*, *divide*, *educate*, *extra*, *fact*, *graduate*, *item*, *joke*, *medicine*, *picture*, *single*, *student*, *timid*, *vest*, and *vote* prevents us from regarding seriously the assertion that Saxon words are superior to Latin words, or that the division into Saxon and Latin furnishes a sound basis of choice.

2. Principles of choice. — *a. Precision.* — There are, nevertheless, well-defined principles of choice. But instead of growing out of words themselves or any simple classification of words, they spring from complex requirements which the whole problem of communication imposes upon everyone who would be understood. The first of these principles is precision. Accurate self-expression is the most obvious requisite of good writing. The writer must say what is in his heart to say; and he succeeds in proportion to his ability to embody the given idea in a word that fits it exactly. Now the principle of precision has to do

with this relation of the idea and the word. It demands that every word must say what we want it to say, and that it say no more and no less. It must not express the idea one and a half times, and it must not express it three fourths of one time. There must be no doubt that the word and the idea are as nearly one as they can possibly be. If the idea is specific, the word must be equally specific; if the idea is comprehensive, the word must not be less general than the idea which it is meant to represent. The writer of the following paragraph undoubtedly based his choice of words on precision, — oneness of the idea and the word, — rather than on any other principle.

In the case of the red coral, the hard skeleton belongs to the interior of the stem and branches only; but in the commoner white corals, each polyp has a complete skeleton of its own. These polyps are sometimes solitary, in which case the whole skeleton is represented by a single cup, with partitions radiating from its center to its circumference. When the polyps formed by budding or division remain associated, the polypidom is sometimes made up of nothing but an aggregation of these cups, while at other times the cups are at once separated and held together, by an intermediate substance, which represents the branches of the red coral. The red coral polyp again is a comparatively rare animal, inhabiting a limited area, the skeleton of which has but a very insignificant mass; while the white corals are very common, occur in almost all seas, and form skeletons which are sometimes extremely massive.[1]

There is no recipe for precision. Nevertheless, a firm grasp of the subject-matter to be treated, a wide range of words of every acceptable class, a full knowledge of the present and, if possible, the past meanings of these words, and a sensitive conscience will usually leave very little to be sought.

b. Economy. — Precision is but the simplest of the principles of choice. A writer who chooses words that fit the idea closely may still fail utterly in communicating his thought to others. Writing, we have already found, is a process involving both self-expression and communication; the reader as well as the thought to be expressed must be considered. Hence the writer is obliged to conform not only to the principle of precision but

[1] Huxley, *On Coral and Coral Reefs.*

to the principle of economy. Economy demands in all cases, whether the material require full or compact treatment, that the writer save the reader as much effort as he can; that he give to the reader the greatest possible degree of understanding for the smallest possible degree of mental exertion. In other words, we must make ourselves understood easily. To be sure, we cannot know all the individuals who will read what we write; yet, while we are about our work, it is always possible, even necessary, to have a somewhat definite audience in mind. We must never lose sight of the classes of people who would probably be interested in what we have to say, and we must choose words to meet the degree of intelligence, experience, and systematic knowledge that they may reasonably be supposed to possess. We must go one step further: we must choose words that are probably most familiar to them. If we make ourselves understood, we have achieved reasonable success; but the highest success comes only when we have made ourselves easily and unmistakably understood. The ideal toward which we should strive is to create in our readers the pleasurable feeling of self-respect that arises from their ability to understand without conscious effort. The ease with which the average reader can grasp the following paragraph on the nature of the ballad exemplifies this ideal. A less skillful writer undoubtedly would have talked much about objectivity, subjectivity, egoism, and the like.

A ballad is a song that tells a story, or — to take the other point of view — a story told in song. More formally, it may be defined as a short narrative poem, adapted for singing, simple in plot and metrical structure, divided into stanzas, and characterized by complete impersonality as far as the author or singer is concerned. This last trait is of the very first consequence in determining the quality or qualities which give the ballad its peculiar place in literature. A ballad has no author. At all events, it appears to have none. The teller of the story for the time being is as much the author as the unknown (and for our purposes unimportant) person who first put it into shape. In most forms of artistic literature the personality of the writer is a matter of deep concern to the reader. The style, we say, is the man. The individuality of one poet distinguishes his works, however they may vary among themselves, from the works of all other poets. Chaucer,

for instance, has his way, or his ways, of telling a tale that are not the way, or the ways, of William Morris. If a would-be creative literary artist has no individuality that we can detect, we set him down as conventional, and that is an end of him and of his works. In the ballad it is not so. There the author is of no account. He is not even present. We do not feel sure that he ever existed. At most, we merely infer his existence, at some indefinite time in the past, from the fact of his product: a poem, we think, implies a poet; therefore somebody must have composed this ballad. Until we begin to reason, we have no thought of the author of any ballad, because, so far as we can see, he had no thought of himself.[1]

No doubt it seems that precision and economy must sometimes come into conflict. Quite certainly they do. Any constructive work involves many conflicts. And the most skillful worker is he who can most nearly reduce the conflicts to harmony. When we are at a loss to know whether to adhere absolutely to our meaning or to sacrifice a degree of strict literalness for a larger degree of ease of understanding, we must simply subordinate the one which seems to be the less important; no rule will serve us as an infallible guide; we must exercise judgment. Sometimes we shall decide clearly in favor of precision; sometimes, in favor of economy; but far oftener, if we are really thoughtful, we shall find it unnecessary to make a complete sacrifice of either.

c. Appropriateness. — These two principles, precision and economy, are a reasonable guarantee of clearness, the first quality of all good communication. Sometimes, however, writing will fall short of its purpose even when it is clear. Frequently we are not content merely to be understood; we want to produce an impression more complete than that produced by ease of comprehension alone. This impression is usually deepened by a close regard for appropriateness. Appropriateness requires that our words be in harmony with the subject we are writing about and the occasion that calls forth our effort. The unfortunate person who tries to express all the ordinary, routine affairs of his life in solemn or florid words is above all else

[1] George Lyman Kittredge, Introduction to *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, p. xi. Houghton Mifflin Company.

a violator of appropriateness. The brainless fop may speak of "the unwieldy porkers bathing in the brook," but most of us feel that there is a simpler way. If we are writing about a football game, we should not — and we usually do not — use words appropriate to a sermon or an editorial eulogy. If we are writing about the interesting personal affairs of our daily lives, we do not use the language of a public letter about some question of wide importance. Aside from considerations of clearness, there are times for simple, familiar words; times for simple, dignified words; times for elevated, full-sounding words.

Let us study the examples printed below. Although the words in the three selections differ widely, they are used with equal appropriateness.

(1) Familiar simplicity:

All the dogs are very well; and Foxey is mine, and Froggy is Tarley's, and Frankie has taken up with great white Neddy, — so that nothing is left for Granny but old barking Jacky and Dover when the carriage comes. The donkey sends his compliments to you, and maintains that you are a cousin of his! or a near relation, at all events. He wishes, too, that you and Maggie would come; for he thinks that you will not be so heavy on his back as Tarley and Maggie Rutherford, who now ride him without mercy.

This is Sunday, and Ali is at church — Granny and I taking care of Frankie till she comes back, and he is now hammering very busily at a corner of the carpet, which he says does not lie flat. He is very good, and really too pretty for a boy, though I think his two eyebrows are growing into one, — stretching and meeting each other above his nose! But he has not so many freckles as Tarley, who has a very fine crop of them, which she and I encourage as much as we can. I hope you and Maggie will lay in a stock of them, as I think no little girl can be pretty without them in summer. Our pea-hens are suspected of having young families in some hidden place, for though they pay us short visits now and then, we see them but seldom, and always alone. If you and Maggie were here with your sharp eyes, we think you might find out their secret, and introduce us to a nice new family of young peas. The old papa cock, in the meantime says he knows nothing about them and does not care a farthing! We envy you your young peas of another kind, for we have none yet, nor any asparagus neither, and hope you will bring some down to us in your lap. Tarley sends her love, and I send mine to you all; though I shall think most of

Maggie to-morrow morning, and of you when your birth morning comes. When is that, do you know? It is never dark now here, and we might all go to bed without candles. And so bless you ever and ever, my dear dimply pussie. — Your very loving

GRANDPA.[1]

(2) Elevated simplicity:

And Ahimaaz called, and said unto the king, All is well. And he fell down to the earth upon his face before the king, and said, Blessed be the Lord thy God, which hath delivered up the men that lifted up their hand against my lord the king. And the king said, Is the young man Absalom safe? And Ahimaaz answered. When Joab sent the king's servant, and me thy servant, I saw a great tumult, but I knew not what it was. And the king said unto him, Turn aside, and stand here. And he turned aside, and stood still. And, behold, Cushi came; and Cushi said, Tidings, my lord the king: for the Lord hath avenged thee this day of all them that rose up against thee. And the king said unto Cushi, Is the young man Absalom safe? And Cushi answered. The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise up against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is. And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept; and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son![2]

(3) Elevated, full-sounding words:

When the mariner has been tossed, for many days, in thick weather, and on an unknown sea, he naturally avails himself of the first pause in the storm, the earliest glance of the sun, to take his latitude, and ascertain how far the elements have driven him from his true course. Let us imitate this prudence, and before we float farther on the waves of this debate, refer to the point from which we departed, that we may at least be able to conjecture where we now are.[3]

This paragraph from Webster's speech was well designed, both in its imagery and the sound of its words, to make an impression on the Senate of the United States and the other listeners who had assembled to hear the Reply to Hayne. Yet how ineffective it would have been in a political convention on the plains of

[1] From a letter written by Lord Jeffrey, of the *Edinburgh Review*, to a little granddaughter. Printed by E. V. Lucas in *The Gentlest Art*. The Macmillan Company.

[2] *II Samuel*, xviii, 28–33.

[3] Webster, *Reply to Hayne*, the first paragraph.

Illinois, Lincoln knew full well when he used the same comparison — undoubtedly borrowed from Webster — in his speech of acceptance before the Springfield convention:

MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN OF THE CONVENTION: If we could first know where we are, and whither we are tending, we could better judge what to do, and how to do it.

d. Carrying power. — Important as precision, economy, and appropriateness are, they alone are not sufficient if writing is to be expressive in the highest degree. It may represent the thought exactly, it may be easily understood by the reader, and it may be adapted to the occasion and audience, yet still be lifeless and uninteresting. Words must be chosen for their carrying power; they must bear to the reader fullness and richness of suggestion. Some of them, it is true, have been used so long in routine, stereotyped conversation and writing that it is difficult to give them color; but others are full of the abundant life they have lived. Moreover, one can frequently make a word pleasantly stimulating by giving it the right kind of turn from the ideas with which it is usually associated. It is ordinarily within the range of possibility, therefore, for the writer to make his expression not only passively adequate, but vigorous and penetrating. He can choose words that suggest completeness, variety, mastery, richness of experience. In the fullest sense, he can make his vocabulary carry to his readers definite knowledge of his subject and a very positive suggestion of his own spirit. Note, for example, how the following paragraph is made to yield much more than the mere idea that death is not greatly feared. What words in the paragraph are especially well chosen?

As a matter of fact, although few things are spoken of with more fearful whisperings than this prospect of death, few have less influence on conduct under healthy circumstances. We have all heard of cities in South America built upon the side of fiery mountains, and how, even in this tremendous neighborhood, the inhabitants are not a jot more impressed by the solemnity of mortal conditions than if they were delving gardens in the greenest corner of England. There are serenades and suppers and much gallantry among

the myrtles overhead; and meanwhile the foundation shudders underfoot, the bowels of the mountain growl, and at any moment living ruin may leap sky-high into the moonlight, and tumble man and his merrymaking in the dust. In the eyes of very young people, and very dull old ones, there is something indescribably reckless and desperate in such a picture. It seems not credible that respectable married people, with umbrellas, should find appetite for a bit of supper within quite a long distance of a fiery mountain; ordinary life begins to smell of high-handed debauch when it is carried on so close to a catastrophe; and even cheese and salad, it seems, could hardly be relished in such circumstances without something like a defiance of the Creator. It should be a place for nobody but hermits dwelling in prayer and maceration, or mere born devils drowning care in a perpetual carouse.[1]

The ability to choose words that will carry a rich burden of meaning comes only with persistent, conscientious study of word values, and faithful practice in writing. The necessity of the study becomes evident upon a moment's reflection. In the first place, the pleasant suggestion of an expressive word does not always arise from the same cause. Sometimes it results from the word's aptly concrete character, sometimes from its rather indefinite emotional associations. Unless a writer is content to rely upon chance, he must develop a feeling for these differences. In the second place, in spite of the apparent rigidness of a word, its suggestive power is constantly changing. Slowly but steadily some words are reaching out to new related ideas, thereby taking on new connotations, and others are just as steadily becoming narrower; some are attaining positions of the highest acceptability, and others are rapidly losing their good name, or at least are passing out of fashion. Because of these incessant changes, the writer must be alert to see the direction in which words are going and the new meanings that are becoming attached to them.

This study should include all the parts of speech. Frequently students seem to believe that they may use the most lifeless kind of noun if they will only deck it out with two or three lively adjectives; that any verb which approximates the kind of action or state meant to be expressed is quite good enough if it is only

[1] Stevenson, *Æs Triplex.*

helped along with an adverb or two; and that such an inconsequential matter as putting life and color into prepositions and conjunctions does not merit serious consideration. Such an attitude is fatal to the higher kind of attainment in composition. It is true that some grammatical classes of words are more nearly colorless than others; yet it is equally true that even " mere connectives " may be made to yield a degree of life.

More thoughtful reflection will enable us to see that this ability to choose words which have carrying power is dependent also upon much practice in writing. A word's meaning rests not wholly in itself, but in the other words of the sentence in which it stands. When it is isolated it may appear to be a very acceptable word, — its dictionary meaning may seem to justify us in using it; yet when it is brought into combination with other words of the sentence, it may be invested with a meaning quite different from the one intended. Moreover, a word that is perfectly colorless in one sentence or one grammatical construction may take on color, either favorable or unfavorable, when it is employed in another. To offer a very simple example, the words " of " and " about " mean very much the same thing in the sentences, " He talked of seeing the aviator " and " He talked about seeing the play," but their meanings are quite different in the sentences, " Julia was talked of " and " Julia was talked about." In a similar way, a worn figure of speech that in most circumstances has no suggestion of its literal meaning will sometimes revert to this earlier sense when it is used in a certain context. A student was startled one day, upon rereading one of his themes, to discover that he had written, "Rock River is an excellent *field* for study." Now the experienced writer knows that these many possibilities of word combination are a source not only of danger, but of agreeable effects. The world of poetry abounds in instances of the bringing of apparently colorless words into combination so that the resulting image or idea reveals each word's real spirit. Nothing in the writer's art is more effective than this ability to make the whole greater than the sum of its parts; and probably nothing is

more difficult. It necessitates a wide vocabulary from which to draw words, it requires the using of fresh, lively figures of speech, it involves many departures from the supposedly fixed laws of grammar, and in the choosing of the words themselves it sometimes requires the breaking away from standards that ordinarily are sufficient measures of good usage. Here as nowhere else must we learn that language was made for man, and that its life is determined by his ingenuity. But these higher effects are always involved in many uncertainties. It is painfully easy to experience the most galling of failures, — the failure that is just short of success. The sublime and the comic, the sacred and the trivial, the respectable and the ridiculous, stand very close together. The risk is always great; and only the most persistent experimenting with word combinations will make the risk worth while.

READINGS AND EXERCISES

1. Here is a suggestive explanation of how one professional writer strives consciously for effectiveness in the use of words: "Before any manuscript of mine goes to the typesetters I give it a final reading and weigh it especially for its word values. On my desk at such times there is also a notebook constantly in process of enlargement. It consists of two columns of words: one the word in question and its primal meaning — just as close to the root as I can dig; opposite, the meanings given by common usage. In the final selection of the word I can use, I keep as close to the root as possible to make smooth, easy reading."

2. Bring to class a report of everything you can learn in one of the unabridged dictionaries about the following words: *December, manufacture, candidate, adieu, curfew, daisy, dandelion, parasol, nostrum, quiz, supercilious, squirrel, alarm, tragedy, fathom, handkerchief, kickshaws, mesmerism, sarcasm, lord, nostril.*

3. What is the derivation of the names you employ in ordering your breakfast? Are you familiar with the past of the words you use in daily conversation? Do you try to put life and color into these words?

4. In order to see that every person possesses a technical vocabulary,

talk to a dairyman, a carpenter, a brick mason, or a plumber about his work and yours.

5. How many synonyms and antonyms do you know for each of the following words? Write them and compare your list with the lists made by others. *Modest*, *proposition*, *courage*, *companion*, *clique*, *beautiful*, *sincere*, *patient*, *enthusiastic*, *lawful*, *eager*, *lazy*, *bitter*, *pleasant*, and *good fellow*. From day to day make a short list of this kind until you begin to see the weakness and the strength of your vocabulary.

6. If you have not studied Old and Middle English and wish to see how such study would lend color to many words you now use thoughtlessly, go over the glossary in some edition of Chaucer. How many words are "half familiar" to you?

7. Read the following chapters from Greenough and Kittredge's *Words and their Ways in English Speech:*

III. Learned Words and Popular Words.
VI. Slang and Legitimate Speech.
IX. Fashion in Language.
XV. Fossils.
XVII. Generalization and Specialization of Meaning.
XX. Degeneration of Meaning.

8. If you desire to see clearly the difference between the use of general and specific words, study the explanation in the United States Constitution of the workings of Congress, and compare it with the chapter in Bryce's *The American Commonwealth* (The Macmillan Company) entitled The House at Work.

9. Do you really know how many Saxon words you use? Study a few pages of some theme you have written. Does this study furnish any basis upon which to build a theory of choice?

10. What qualities seem to you to be specially commendable in the following dictionaries?

1. The New International.
2. The Century.
3. The Standard.
4. The Oxford.

Do you know how the dictionary makers secure their material? How do they determine preferences in usage?

11. Compare the language employed in the different parts of a

newspaper. How does the editorial page differ from the first news page; the personal column from the sporting page; the literary page from the financial page?

12. Prepare a list of words that usually have an unfavorable connotation. Observe how the connotation of these words has restricted their meaning.

13. When you are reading, look for passages in which the words seem to be especially effective. How much of this effectiveness is due to the individual words, and how much to their happy combination? Can you give good reasons for your opinion?

CHAPTER IV — THE PRINCIPLES OF COMPOSITION

Every field of constructive work has fundamental principles in accordance with which all individual effort must be directed. Successful execution is not, of course, guaranteed by a mere knowledge of these principles; but no work can have assurance of favorable acceptance if it violates them.

The principles which underlie most kinds of productive work are comparatively few; but they must be applied differently in individual cases. Thoughtless persons sometimes erroneously assume that the individual cases are wholly different and that unchanging principles do not, therefore, really exist. "Every case has its own problems," they declare. That is true. But it is equally true that the thoughtful person sees how it is possible to solve these different problems in accordance with a few general laws. In fact, underlying principles are so evident in all work that even those who do not know how to use them, — even those who profess to disbelieve in their existence, — recognize them as fundamental to fruitful effort. "Why, I should think he would know that that is poor business," "That is not good politics," "He doesn't know what good teaching is," "He lost the game through bad football judgment," and similar remarks are everyday expressions of the belief that we may be guided in a complex field of creative endeavor by our knowledge of a few principles.

In the field of composition, four principles that cannot be disregarded are unity, coherence, emphasis, and variety. Unity demands that in any given piece of work there be singleness of conception; coherence, that the relation of all the parts be unmistakably clear; emphasis, that the ideas be treated according to their importance; and variety, that there be

freedom from unnecessary monotony of thought or of words. These principles have not been created by teachers or critics, nor have they sprung from any attempt to classify artistic effort arbitrarily. On the contrary, they are simply the expression of the accumulated experience of good writers of all times. They were binding upon Vergil, Cicero, Dante, Shakespeare, Addison, and De Quincey, just as they are binding upon the college freshman of the twentieth century. We may yield to their demands without hesitancy, for they are supported by the entire history of literary art.

I. UNITY

A. Unity Applied to the Whole Composition

1. Unity of substance. — Unity requires first of all that the whole composition, regardless of its length, contain one idea to which all the others are subordinate. This principle is based upon the universal belief that the human mind can best consider one thing at a time. If the reader is required to divide his attention or change his point of view, or if he is in any way uncertain about the writer's real purpose, he will inevitably become confused to a lesser or greater degree; and if the violation is flagrant, he will possibly turn his attention to the reading of something that is more easily understood. We must, then, know what we want to say, and without any preliminary skirmishings begin in the first paragraph to say it. Once we have begun, we must not reach out to unrelated matter. There must be no turning aside to thoughts or incidents, however attractive, that do not form a part of the central idea. It matters not how interesting a digression may be, the pursuance of it is always like following a blind alley: one must return to the point of leaving the main thoroughfare before one can make further progress. And no reader likes to retrace his steps simply because an author did not know where he was going.

2. Unity of purpose. — This matter of keeping to the central idea is really not so much a question of substance as of treat-

ment or approach. We do not secure unity by finding a number of ideas that fit into unchangeable groups; ideas are not thus naturally classified. Instead, we bring several apparently unrelated ideas together so that the one central thought unites them vitally. For example, cement walks, moving picture shows, university professors, and free public baths may in themselves seem to be quite without significant relation. But when a writer shows that the social life of the Stockyards district in Chicago is being improved by means of good walks, wholesome picture shows in the settlement houses, lectures on hygiene by university professors, and the practical application of some of the lectures in the form of free public baths, we can see at once that these subjects might easily be brought together in a perfectly unified composition. The unending stream of ideas cannot be marked off into distinct units, but we can guide it so that all its force is brought to bear on any subject we may choose to treat.

3. **Unity of tone.** — It would be erroneous, however, to assume that this principle is limited to substance and purpose. In addition, it demands that the tone of the subordinate ideas and the language in which they are expressed be in harmony with the central idea. Unity of tone is what Voltaire held up as an ideal after he had declared, "One of the greatest defects of the age . . . is the mixture of styles." If our subject is of great importance, we should not mix the trivial with it; if it is serious, we should not destroy its seriousness by treating it part of the time as if it were light; if it is formal, we should not try the impossible feat of mixing the familiarity of ordinary conversation with it; if recondite, we should not patch it up with important-sounding statements of the obvious; and finally, if we are sincere, we should not call our attitude into question by occasionally resorting to burlesque. From these suggestions it should not be understood that the writer ought to adhere monotonously to one kind of expression. He may safely resort to many expedients to secure variety. A touch of humor, a bit of genuine pathos, a word of satire, a few lines of anecdote or in-

cident, are thoroughly legitimate resources. But if he chooses to brighten his pages with anecdote or concrete incident, he should have regard for the kind of incident or illustration he employs.

An example will make the spirit of this counsel unmistakable. A memorial service was being held in honor of a man who had served his country with distinction as soldier and diplomat. The principal speaker was very seriously trying to have everyone in the hall see clearly how General —— always succeeded in the tasks he set before himself. In a final attempt he said: "No doubt all of you have seen the shooting galleries at the county fairs. There is a white target with about a dozen black rings around the center, behind which is a little bell. Well, you know if you hit the center of the target, you ring the bell. General ——, my dear friends, never failed to ring the bell!" The incongruity of the illustration made it impossible for many of the listeners to keep their minds seriously on General ——'s successes.

To have close unity in the whole composition requires the most exacting care. As we shall see, it is not difficult to test the unity of a paragraph or sentence, because they are small enough to be kept easily in mind and, usually, in sight. But the whole composition, even if it be only a few paragraphs long, cannot so readily be fixed in mind, and it cannot be surveyed at one glance. There are, however, means that will serve us. One of these is the accurate phrasing of our purpose; a clear-cut statement defines the limits of the field. Another is a written plan of the steps in the development of the subject. Still another is the keeping of a definite audience in mind. We are less likely to wander from our purpose or change our tone when we write for specific people or specific classes of people. And finally, we shall be in less danger of violating unity if we make an unhesitating effort to arrive at the most significant matter as soon as we can do so without endangering clearness. If we are very intent upon reaching a fixed point, we are less likely to turn aside on the way.

B. Unity Applied to the Paragraph

The paragraph, too, must be constructed according to this principle of unity. It is true that the paragraph is, except in rather infrequent instances, a part of the greater unit, the whole composition; yet it is itself organically complete. Like the larger unit, it must have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Furthermore, it must not include material which belongs logically just before its beginning or after its ending. In other words, it must be stripped of everything that might cling to its exterior. Nor must it include within its body any material which is clearly a digression from the current of thought it carries. Such a digression will render the paragraph either mildly ineffective or openly ludicrous. Observe how the following example violates unity by introducing irrelevant matter in this way:

The bride and groom took an evening train for their home in Chicago, where Mr. —— will resume the practice of his profession. Just recently his mother died, after having suffered from tuberculosis for more than two years. The happy couple will make their home in Englewood, in the cozy flat which the groom has elaborately furnished.

Note, too, how unity may be destroyed by an unsuccessful effort to unite two coördinate thoughts:

The passenger pigeons were very numerous and of exceedingly interesting habits. In the early fall they migrated to the central states to feed upon the stubble lands. Frequently there were so many of them that when they flew over a town it was as if a cloud had passed under the sun. They would settle on a stubble field, devour the grains of wheat that had been shattered out at harvest time, then in the evening collect in some piece of timberland near by to pass the night. Sometimes they would pile themselves in the trees until great limbs would crash to earth with the weight. With a roar the entire flock would rise in the air, circle about until they saw that no danger approached, then settle down again. It is to the professional pot-hunter that we owe the complete extermination of the pigeons. As the cities increased in population, there arose a great demand for the dressed birds, and all over the country men dropped their regular occupations and started to trap and net pigeons for the market. Since as

high as a thousand were caught in a single spring of the net, it is no wonder that the birds were soon entirely exterminated from America.

Frequently, too, unity is violated by making a paragraph of each sentence. In other words, the so-called paragraph does not perform the function of developing a principal idea at all; it merely states an idea. The reader gains a false notion of relations, because what he first takes to be units are, he sooner or later discovers, only fragments. Note the choppy, unorganized impression which the following sentences produce:

I was born on a four-hundred-acre farm ten miles south of Cleveland, January 16, 1891.

Until I was old enough to go to school, the only playmates I had were my two sisters and my brother, all of whom were much older than I.

When I started to school I had other playmates, but not many, for there were only sixteen pupils in the school. Ten of these were girls, and since I did not like to play with girls, I did not have many more companions than some boys have in their own homes.

So you see when I was a boy I had plenty of time to be by myself and think.

In truth, they constitute only one paragraph. If anyone doubts that they would produce a single impression if thus written, let him bring them into paragraph form and make the test.

If, now, we desire to see the difference between the imperfectly unified paragraph and the one which is well unified, we have only to contrast one of these foregoing examples with the one which follows. Although it is long, it contains only one thought; namely, that freedom of bargaining is essential to the best interests of the trades-unions.

Freedom of bargaining is not only thus essential to the community, and especially to the workingmen; it is also essential to the best interests of the trades-unions. The trades-union, to be permanently efficient, must be an organization of free men; it must be composed of members who believe in unionism and are loyal to it; it must be an industrial army of volunteers, not of drafted men; it must make its way in the labor world by persuading the laborers that it is for their interest to join it and be loyal to it, not by coercing them to join it by threats of violence on the one hand or of starva-

tion on the other. There is only one organization which in a free community men may be compelled to join whether they will or not — namely, the State. They are born into the State, are members of the State, must obey the laws enacted by the State, in time of danger must come to the defense of the State, must, if necessary, hazard their lives for the State. This is true of no other organism. If they are coerced into the church, as they were in the Middle Ages, the same process which deprives them of their freedom deprives the church of its spiritual vitality. If they are coerced into a labor organization, as some labor leaders would have them in this twentieth century, the same process which deprives them of their freedom deprives the labor organizations of that spirit of brotherhood which is at once the justification for its existence and the inspiration of its power. The right of labor to organize rests upon the right of the individual to labor. Whoever denies this right of the individual denies the foundation on which the right of organized labor rests.[1]

The test for paragraph unity is not an absolute test, because completeness is itself a relative matter. Any subject may be dealt with in a sentence, a paragraph, or a long series of paragraphs. If the writer desires to treat in detail the material which he has already expressed only in the large, he does not alter the organization of the more general treatment, but simply carries out a scheme of proportional amplification. Thus what was before only a sentence now becomes a paragraph; the central idea passes through a process of iteration, example, illustration, and perhaps summary. Nevertheless, a reasonably satisfactory test is possible; and it is to be found in this very process of thought development. We cannot, it is true, determine absolutely whether a paragraph is so well rounded that it is sure to mark a full step in the whole composition, but we can always ascertain whether it expresses more than one chief thought, and whether it contains incidental digressions. This test is made by trying to put the substance of the paragraph into one sentence, — the sentence from which, in theory at least, it was originally developed.

From what has been said about this test it should not be understood that every paragraph contains a topic sentence. Some-

[1] Lyman Abbott, *The Outlook*, Vol. 77, p. 633.

times a sentence of this kind is quite unnecessary, and occasionally — for example, in summary or transition paragraphs — it is wholly impossible. It is, to be sure, often advisable to begin the paragraph with such a sentence, inasmuch as the brief introductory statement of purpose always helps to make comprehension easy. Not infrequently it contributes to clearness to go further and repeat the substance of this first sentence at the end of the paragraph. But neither the former nor the latter is in every case essential. It is not the printed presence of the topic sentence that unity demands, but the living possibility of such a sentence.

C. Unity Applied to the Sentence

The application of unity to the sentence is frequently a much more difficult problem than it first appears to be. We have observed that making a test for unity in the paragraph is more definite procedure than making a similar test in the whole composition. Hence it might seem that the application of the principle to the sentence would be a still simpler matter. But here in the smallest of the three units we encounter difficulty that arises solely from the fact that the unit is small. What is a sentence, anyhow? Doubtless we have been told innumerable times that it is a group of words expressing a complete thought. But what is a thought? When is a thought complete? When is it more than complete? When is it less than complete? We should find ourselves needlessly delayed if we should stop to answer all these questions in detail; but we can afford to consider for a moment the mental action that results in a thought, a sentence.

Every normal human mind is teeming with apparently unrelated ideas or concepts. Whenever two of these are related by mental processes, the result is what psychologists call a judgment. In the language of those of us who do not hold so strictly to technical phraseology, this result is a thought. A thought, then, is complete only when it expresses the relation

of at least two ideas. As a simple example, " students " and " write " standing apart cannot be regarded as expressing a thought; but they do express a thought when we bring together the ideas for which they stand, and say " Students write." In the language of grammar, we have a subject and a predicate. If, now, we bear this essential nature of a thought clearly in mind, we can always ascertain whether our sentences violate unity in one respect, — that of being less than complete. Thus it is easy to see that " A noticeable man with large gray eyes " is not a sentence. It is scarcely more difficult to see the incompleteness of the longer fragment: " A long stretch of track, where the endless corn rows, straight and clean, seem to revolve slowly around the train." We can see also that the following example should be written not as two sentences but as one:

My roommate sits quietly down at his desk, picks up paper and pen, and writes his theme in two hours. While I spend two or three afternoons at the task.

Although the grammatical dependence of such clauses as the one beginning with " While " ought to be clearly evident, dismembered sentences of this kind are painfully numerous in the work of inexperienced writers. Here again we are without an absolute standard, yet if we make a test for the simplest kind of thought completeness, the dependence of the detached clause usually becomes clear.

The other common violation of sentence unity is overcompleteness. It is true, of course, that occasionally we find a sentence which violates the principle because of a digression in a subordinate clause, as in this example:

When the other four came in, Jack was admiring Claribel, who for two days had been thinking about a girl friend who could not come back to college because her grandmother had been injured in a railroad wreck.

But instances of this kind are so unusual that they need not detain us. The troublesome sentence is the one which does not introduce wholly unrelated matter, but instead brings to-

gether coördinate thoughts that do not stand in manifest relation to each other; that is, the thoughts expressed in the coördinate clauses of the sentence are so unlike that they will not blend. The fault is obvious in the following example:

School, College, and Character is very interesting and is published by the Houghton Mifflin Company.

While violations of this kind are not always so easily discerned as in this case, they are alike in their essence; they are the result of an attempt to make an impossible mental union. That the fault is not due to grammatical structure alone may be seen in a sentence built in precisely the same way, yet quite satisfactory in its unity:

School, College, and Character is as interesting as a novel and is more inspiring than most sermons.

II. COHERENCE

As we have seen, unity is a principle which has to do with the writer's ability to produce one impression at a time. Whether he is writing a whole composition or a paragraph, his purpose, the material he employs in carrying out his purpose, and the attitude he maintains toward his subject while he works must blend in this one impression. But if the distinct thoughts are to contribute to this impression, they must stand in unmistakable relation to one another. Now in making relations clear, it is necessary to bring to our aid the service of another cardinal principle of composition, — coherence. Unity is a matter of assembling or blending ideas; coherence is a matter of using mechanical means to make the relation of these ideas perfectly clear. In other words, coherence makes unity visible by giving it a body. If the matters about which we write are a series of transactions, coherence guides us in arranging them in the simplest chronological order; if they are closely related solely because they are similar in significance, coherence will show this connection by making their order closely logical;

if the thoughts are not coördinate, but instead stand in the relation of principal and subordinate, coherence will reveal this. Every relation, in truth, whether based upon time, cause and effect, comparison, contrast, or mere addition, finds proper expression only when we write in conformity with the principle of coherence.

A. Coherence Applied to the Whole Composition

1. **Coherence through sequence.** — Applied to the whole composition, coherence demands as an essential to easy clearness that the paragraphs be arranged in an order that will seem inevitable to the reader. He must feel that the writer thought out his way with such sureness that his paragraphs form a perfect series. If we are writing narrative, directly chronological order will doubtless be clearer than any other. If, however, we are explaining a theory, making an argument, or doing any other kind of writing in which the element of chronology is not present or is only incidental, we should be guided by the ease with which the reader can make logical progress in the discussion. He should not be compelled to retrace his steps, and he should not be uncertain about the direction in which he is going. The effect of orderly arrangement may be seen by comparing the columns of headings which follow. Which is the better?

Making a Tennis Court	Making a Tennis Court
I. Laying off a court.	I. Securing the site for the court.
II. The best site for a court.	II. Laying off the court.
III. Putting up the backstops and net posts.	III. Removing the sod.
IV. Removing the sod.	IV. Leveling the ground.
V. Leveling the ground.	V. Rolling the ground.
VI. Rolling the ground.	VI. Putting up the backstops and net posts.
VII. Marking the court.	VII. Marking the court.

Or take an example in which there is no element of chronology:

Burbank's Work as a Scientist	Burbank's Work as a Scientist
I. Burbank as a man.	I. Burbank as a man.
II. Burbank's method of work.	II. Burbank's place of work.
III. Burbank's achievements.	III. Burbank's method of work.
IV. Burbank's aim.	IV. Burbank's aim.
V. Burbank's place of work.	V. Burbank's achievements.

2. **Coherence through skillful transitions.** — Important as order is as a means of guiding a reader, it cannot be relied upon solely. Order suggests only general direction; the reader must in addition be constantly aware of the individual steps he takes. If we desire, then, to be unmistakably clear, we must make skillful transitions from paragraph to paragraph. Every time the reader begins a new paragraph he must see without delay the relation it bears to the ones which precede it. Experienced professional writers are exceedingly careful in helping the reader in this way. The care which they exercise in securing these easy transitions is usually overlooked or forgotten, because the more skillful the transition, the less attention it attracts. If, however, we isolate the sentences whereby the transitions are made, we can see readily how important they are. We can see then how the thought of each paragraph is gathered up and carried on into the one which succeeds it. We can see, too, that the means usually employed are conjunctions, demonstratives, the repetition of key words or key ideas, and the utilization of entire sentences to modify or bend the course of the thought. As an example, let us study the following paragraph-beginnings from Professor John Hays Gardiner's discussion of Biblical narrative.[1] Although we cannot see how each paragraph is developed, we can see that each one is clearly related to the ones which precede. The first paragraph is printed in full, in order that the purpose of the chapter may be evident.

In any adequate study of the narrative of the Bible there must be a considerable amount of analysis and discrimination; for the narrative of the

[1] *The Bible as English Literature*, p. 34 ff. Charles Scribner's Sons. Used in this manner with the kind permission of the author.

New Testament differs from that of the Old Testament, and within the Old Testament itself there is great variety of type. Nevertheless, one can say that all the narrative of the Bible shows a combination of two sets of qualities: on the one hand it has a simplicity and a limpid and vivid clearness which make it appeal to all sorts and conditions of men; on the other hand through its whole range it has an undercurrent of earnestness and strong feeling. Thus the style clothes and transfigures even homely events with beauty and spiritual power; and the concreteness and clearness crystallize the deep feeling expressed by the strong rhythm and the varied music of the style. These two sets of characteristics, then, the simplicity and vivid clearness on the one hand, and the earnestness and rich depth of feeling on the other, we may take as the most characteristic attributes of these narratives. * * * * * * * * * * * *

By a discussion of these attributes in the light thrown on the various books by modern scholarship we shall be able partly to trace some of the causes from which they proceed. * * * * * * * *

In our ordinary speech the phrase "Biblical narrative" seems to express a definite enough fact for our present purpose; yet when one thinks over the various books of the Bible, their differences begin to stand out and give us pause. * * * * * * * * * * * *

The type of narrative that springs most readily to one's mind when he speaks of the Biblical narrative is the vivid kind of story which for the most part fills Genesis, Samuel, and Kings. * * * * * *

These characteristics can be made more palpable by putting an example from the earliest type beside one from the latest type. * * * *

In the second chapter, after the fourth verse, all this is changed. * *

Two more examples will make clearer the difference in thought and substance between these different types of narrative. * * * * *

Let us consider more carefully the simple and vivid narrative. * *

Yet if we knew only these stories in the Old Testament, we should miss a notable element of what makes up our impression of the Biblical narrative. * * * * * * * * * * * *

At the same time the repetitiousness of style, which is one of its characteristics, establishes a strength of rhythm which deepens and emphasizes the meaning of the history. * * * * * * * *

In the English the portions of the histories which come from this source have always this sonorousness and fullness of sound. * * * *

The third type of narrative which must be taken into account in forming an estimate of the Biblical narrative as a whole is that of Deuteronomy and the analogous passages in the other histories. * * * * *

I hope that this very brief review of so huge a field will have sufficed to make clear the fact that these stories of the Bible, in spite of their general effect of simple and vivid clearness suffused and enriched by a singular depth

and earnestness of feeling, are made up of distinct elements which can be discovered and isolated by analysis. * * * * * *

An even greater change followed the revelation made in the sixth century B.C. that the God of the Jews was the one God, who had made the heavens and the earth, and all that therein is. * * * * * *

Speaking very broadly, then, we may say that the limpid simplicity and the instinct for living and vivifying detail in the first of our three types of narrative, * * * * * * * * * * *

Yet in the end we must remember that analysis is not literature; and that although this analysis is worth making since it helps one to see perspective instead of a flat surface, yet in the end the natural way of reading is the true way for literature. * * * * * * * *

Sometimes when the whole composition is very long, it is advisable to employ entire paragraphs in showing the relations of the main divisions. A paragraph of this kind should perform precisely the same office between the larger units of the discourse that the transition sentence performs between individual paragraphs. In other words, it should point back to the group of paragraphs immediately preceding it, and at the same time point forward to the group which follows.

B. Coherence Applied to the Paragraph

1. **Coherence through sentence order.** — When we turn from the whole composition to the paragraph, we at once discover one clear difference in the application of the principle of coherence: sequence or order is not determined solely by the material within the paragraph, but in part by the function of the paragraph in the whole composition. Thus the paragraphs which precede it or follow it may demand that it consist of definition, description, narration, illustration, or the enumeration of specific instances. As a result of this external demand, the topic sentence may in some cases be expressed at the beginning; in others, at the end; in others, both at the beginning and at the end; and in still others, there may be no topic sentence at all. These possible variations show clearly that sentence order within a paragraph is determined very largely by the whole

composition of which the paragraph is a part, and that for this reason no very definite suggestions about sequence in the paragraph can be made.

2. **Coherence through conjunctional words and phrases.** — Regardless, however, of the form which the neighbors of a paragraph may force it to take, the relations of all its parts may be made clear. In the first place, it is possible to make conjunctional words and phrases perform precisely the same function within the paragraph that the transition sentences perform in the whole composition. Changes or modifications of thought resulting from comparison, contrast, cause and effect, change of time, change of place, mere addition, or other fundamental relations, can always be suggested through these words and phrases. In truth, they are so important in accurate expression that no student can hope to attain reasonable proficiency unless he masters them. He must be always ready to make his thoughts secure with *furthermore*, *again*, *moreover*, *finally*, *nevertheless*, *however*, *notwithstanding*, *on the other hand*, *still*, *consequently*, *accordingly*, *hence*, *therefore*, *meanwhile*, *at length*, *at any rate*, *for example*, *in fact*, *in truth*, *to be sure*, *undoubtedly*, *logically*, *naturally*, *as a matter of fact*, *in reality*, and other words or phrases of this kind. Let us notice the effect of the skillful use of these " hooks and eyes of style " in the following paragraph:

But we want something more for its explanation, for there are bodily exercises which are liberal, and mental exercises which are not so. *For instance*, in ancient times the practitioners in medicine were commonly slaves; yet it was an art as intellectual in its nature, in spite of the pretense, fraud, and quackery with which it might then, as now, be debased, as it was heavenly in its aim. *And so in like manner*, we contrast a liberal education with a commercial education or a professional; yet no one can deny that commerce and the professions afford scope for the highest and most diversified powers of mind. *There is, then*, a great variety of intellectual exercises, which are not technically called "liberal"; on the other hand, I say, there are exercises of the body which do not receive that appellation. *Such, for instance*, was the palæstra, in the ancient times; such the Olympic games, in which strength and dexterity of body as well as of mind gained the prize. In Xenophon we read of the young Persian nobility being taught to ride on

horseback and to speak the truth; both being among the accomplishments of a gentleman. War, *too*, however rough a profession, has ever been accounted liberal, unless in cases when it becomes heroic, which would introduce us to another subject.[1]

3. **Coherence through reference words and repetition.** — Coherence within the paragraph is dependent, too, on the effective use of reference words and on the repetition of words which are important to the thought. Skill in the former of these means comes only with habits of close thinking, the development of a grammatical conscience, and practice in revising or recasting sentences. Especially is practice in revising and recasting important, since it is frequently necessary to reshape or invert a sentence in order to bring out its grammatical relations clearly. We must be sure that *these*, *those*, *he*, *it*, *that*, *this*, *who*, *which*, *where*, and other words of similar kind refer to definite things, and that the reference cannot be misunderstood. Skill in the repetition of important words is usually the outgrowth of care in the use of reference words, especially demonstratives. Very frequently the accurate use of the *this* or *that* prevents the repetition from being awkward, and at the same time makes it emphatic. Observe the part which reference words and legitimate repetitions have in producing absolute clarity in Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Note especially the effect of the words italicized:

Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether *that nation*, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of *that war*. We have come to dedicate a portion of *that field* as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives that *that nation* might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do *this*. But in a larger sense we cannot dedicate — we cannot consecrate — we cannot hallow — *this ground*. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled *here*, have consecrated *it*, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say *here*, but it can never forget what *they* did *here*. It is for us the living,

[1] Newman, *The Idea of a University*, p. 107. Longmans, Green, and Company.

rather, to be dedicated *here* to the unfinished work which *they* who fought *here* have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be *here* dedicated to the great task remaining before us — that from *these honored dead* we take increased devotion to that cause for which *they* gave the last full measure of devotion — that we *here* highly resolve that *these dead* shall not have died in vain — that *this nation*, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom — and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

4. Coherence through parallel constructions. — Another means of paragraph coherence is the parallel structure of sentences having similar significance. Although this means may be easily abused by carrying it to such a degree that it results in painful monotony, it is the most natural way of expressing a number of thoughts that focus directly in one main effect. Its use is well illustrated in another passage from Newman, — the first paragraph of his definition of a gentleman:

Hence it is that it is almost a definition of a gentleman to say he is one who never inflicts pain. This description is both refined and, as far as it goes, accurate. He is mainly occupied in merely removing the obstacles which hinder the free and unembarrassed action of those about him; and he concurs with their movements rather than takes the initiative himself. His benefits may be considered as parallel to what are called comforts or conveniences in arrangements of a personal nature: like an easy chair or a good fire, which do their part in dispelling cold or fatigue, though nature provides both means of rest and animal heat without them. The true gentleman in like manner carefully avoids whatever may cause a jar or a jolt in the minds of those with whom he is cast; — all clashing of opinion, or collision of feeling, all restraint, or suspicion, or gloom, or resentment; his great concern being to make everyone at his ease and at home. He has his eyes on all his company; he is tender towards the bashful, gentle towards the distant, and merciful towards the absurd; he can recollect to whom he is speaking; he guards against unseasonable allusions, or topics which may irritate; he is seldom prominent in conversation, and never wearisome. He makes light of favors while he does them, and seems to be receiving when he is conferring. He never speaks of himself except when compelled, never defends himself by a mere retort, he has no ears for slander or gossip, is scrupulous in imputing motives to those who interfere with him, and interprets everything for the best. He is never mean or little in his disputes, never takes unfair advantage, never mistakes personalities or sharp sayings for

arguments, or insinuates evil which he dare not say out. From a long-sighted prudence, he observes the maxim of the ancient sage, that we should ever conduct ourselves towards our enemy as if he were one day to be our friend. He has too much good sense to be affronted at insults, he is too well employed to remember injuries, and too indolent to bear malice. He is patient, forbearing, and resigned, on philosophical principles; he submits to pain, because it is inevitable, to bereavement, because it is irreparable, and to death, because it is his destiny.[1]

C. Coherence Applied to the Sentence

1. Coherence through word order. — In securing coherence within the sentence, sequence or order is very important. In the first place, it is important because, as we saw in applying the principle to the whole composition and the paragraph, one order of thought may be more easily grasped than another. But there is another very important reason: the English language is not highly inflected, and must, therefore, depend largely upon word order to indicate grammatical relations. Note how the following sentences might be improved merely by changing the order of the parts:

Both teams showed a dogged determination to win from the kick-off.

I only have freshman standing.

Except for the work of cutting up and boiling the blubber, and the second mate, into whose bad graces Sid had fallen, Sid seems to have enjoyed himself very well.

I lived in dread of being permanently discharged for five months.

The president and faculty must stand for that as well as the students.

2. Coherence through conjunctions. — Although conjunctions stand out more prominently as means of uniting the paragraph, they may have a very important part in the coherence of the sentence. This importance is increased, too, by the fact that the conjunctions of a sentence constitute the meeting ground of unity, coherence, and emphasis. For instance, when we revise a sentence to make its conjunctions serve us better, we usually do not stop with the substitution of word

[1] *The Idea of a University*, p. 208 f.

for word, but change the sentence order, or elevate one clause or subordinate another. Thus when we revise the sentence, "I talked with John and learned that his father was better," so that it reads, "I learned from John that his father was better," we not only secure more immediate clearness through more accurately expressed relations, but also blend the ideas into one and make that one stand out sharply. Instead, therefore, of letting the conjunctions within the sentence take care of themselves, we should give them the most thoughtful attention. The entire life of the sentence is often dependent upon them.

3. Coherence through reference words. — The exact use of reference words, too, is an unfailing aid. Here, as in the case of word order, we can perhaps best see the importance of accuracy and definiteness by noting the fatal effect of inaccuracy or indefiniteness. Let us examine, therefore, the sentences printed below and find means of rendering their meaning unmistakable:

The same is true of the liquor habit; they drink it because they cannot give it up.

The buggy was soon at my side and I noticed that it was Mr. Beck.

After talking for a short time he left the other declaring that he was such a fool that ideas had to be beaten into his head.

Reaching the creek, we put out two throw lines and four poles. No sooner had the lines hit the water than they began to bite.

Mr. McAdoo looks up from his bent position over the contents of his plate, which he has been devouring in large mouthfuls.

Although I agree with Mr. Briggs in this statement, I think it is very seldom that this is the case.

The reference of participles must be as definite as the reference of pronouns, demonstratives, and adverbs. Revise the following sentences:

Coming into the English room one day, a wild duck was placed on the professor's desk.

The first appearance of the team was good, having seven or eight men who weighed a hundred and eighty.

While eating my dinner Tuesday one of the fellows said, "Say, fellows, let's go and see the exhibition car."

After gulping down my coffee the train pulled out.

4. Coherence through the matching of grammatical parts. — Again, just as parallel structure contributes to coherence in the paragraph, so the matching of grammatical parts contributes to it in the sentence. Thus we should avoid yoking the passive with the active, or a noun with a clause, or an infinitive with a participle. The fault is illustrated in these examples:

They met every week for the purpose of discussing questions of the day and to renew friendships of the classroom.

Although the men were in good condition, a very poor game was played.

Having much to do and as the opening of college was only three weeks off, I could not go with them on the trip.

The first team faced the collegians in the first contest, while the New Haven men had the colts as their opponents in the second game.

Usually violations of this kind do not result in complete misunderstanding, but in temporary confusion; the way is not hidden, but it is uncertain. The immediate certainty that results from matching the grammatical parts perfectly is obvious as soon as the sentences are revised.

5. Coherence through the avoidance of undue ellipsis. — Coherence in the sentence is further strengthened if the writer carefully avoids undue ellipsis. The spirit of the age encourages the writer to express everything with telegraphic brevity; and he is frequently tempted too far. Sometimes, to be sure, the effect is only "businesslike precision," but too often it is uncertainty, vagueness, or complete misunderstanding. Are the following sentences easily grasped? How could they be rendered unmistakably clear?

Although a drunkard, I cannot help admiring him.

There were but three ready to start, — a boy on a big bay, a little Indian pony, and Maud.

The packer places the shingles on this mold, and when full he nails the strips of wood and tin around them.

6. Coherence through punctuation. — The one other means of sentence coherence that should receive the attention of every student is punctuation. Unfortunately, this method of making oneself clear is seriously neglected; a comma, for example, is looked upon as a very insistent yet inconsequential enemy. It is spoken of as if it were a thing deserving the consideration of children, but not of men and women. Yet the conventional marks of punctuation, though there may be some difference of opinion about occasional specific cases, perform a large part in revealing the relations of words, phrases, and clauses. If they are used carelessly, they result in confusion or even serious misunderstanding; if they are used skillfully, they are substantial aids in making oneself unquestionably clear. Even in such supposedly simple matters as the full signification of a series of words, the exact effect of a relative clause, or the meaning of a sentence intended to be direct address, punctuation plays an important part. Are the following sentences helpfully punctuated?

With every sentence he was in dread lest he might say something, which would scare her away.

He shows how patronizing the boys who are allowed to run around in clothes, which need no care, really are.

In the middle of this row stands the largest building known as Center Hall.

He always was a little stubborn Dick. (Direct address.)

But the influence of punctuation reaches far beyond these fundamental matters. We might well heed the words of Poe, who felt deeply the significance of every mark: "That punctuation is important all agree; but how few comprehend the extent of its importance! The writer who neglects punctuation, or mispunctuates, is liable to be misunderstood; this, according to the popular idea, is the sum of the evils arising from heedlessness or ignorance. It does not seem to be known that, even where the sense is perfectly clear, a sentence may be deprived of half its force, its spirit, its point, by improper punctuations. For

the want of merely a comma, it often occurs that an axiom appears a paradox, or that a sarcasm is converted into a sermonoid. There seems to exist a vulgar notion that the subject is one of pure conventionality, and cannot be brought within the limits of intelligible and consistent rule. And yet, if fairly looked in the face, the whole matter is so plain that its rationale may be read as we run." [1]

If any student feels that he has not mastered punctuation to a reasonable degree, let him betake himself at once to any one of a score of helpful books which deal with the subject, and there master the fundamentals. Then let him study the best writing of the day to see the practice upon which the rules are established.

III. EMPHASIS

A. Emphasis in the Whole Composition

Emphasis is a principle based upon the conviction that some things are more important than others. In the whole composition it demands that the larger units, — the paragraphs and groups of paragraphs, — be so treated that their comparative importance is at once evident. Usually this may be done in one of two ways. First, things that deserve chief consideration may occupy much space; secondly, they may be put in the most prominent positions. In other words, emphasis usually resolves itself into a matter of proportion or position.

1. **Emphasis by proportion.** — The prime importance of proportion becomes clear when we consider the actual circumstances that guide the writer in his work. To begin with, virtually every piece of writing must be fitted into a place not originally determined by the writer. Magazine editors demand stories of certain length; book publishers want novels that are not too long; congregations insist upon having sermons that are short; busy merchants and physicians want the affairs of the week put into compressed form; and even the friends

[1] *Marginalia.*

with whom we have correspondence like to receive letters that do not encroach unnecessarily upon their time. We cannot, therefore, ramble about until we are sure we have said everything we have to say, even if good literary form would permit us to do so. Instead, we must decide upon the limits within which we are to keep, and then adjust all the parts so that the ones to which we hope the reader will give his chief attention may not be overshadowed by the ones that are less important.

A modification of emphasis by proportion is iteration. Instead of massing the whole weight of a proposition or transaction in one place, iteration distributes it. Sometimes it manifests itself in verbal repetition, at intervals long enough to prevent monotony, one sentence or one phrase being used again and again; for example, Arnold's "formulas." Sometimes it appears in a repetition of the thought without the repetition of phrase, the emphasis being produced by approaching the same thought from many different sides. In either case, the effect is the same: the reader is prevented from allowing the important part of the subject-matter to slip from his attention. The recurrence of the same thought fixes it firmly in mind, even though he momentarily dismisses it as he follows the writer in the development of the general theme.

2. **Emphasis by paragraph position.** — The theory of emphasis by position, too, is well established. We cannot fix our mind on anything and keep it steadily there for a very long period; our attention rises and falls more or less regularly. If, however, we are anticipating a change of any kind in the matter to which we are giving or may give our attention, we are stimulated to more vigorous, more constant mental effort. For example, we always remember just how our friends look and just what they say in the excitement of their arrival or departure, although the great middle portion of their visit may have left only a very indefinite impression of pleasure. Now in a similar way the material that is placed at the beginning or the end of a composition usually produces a more definite impression than that which comes between. When we read the first paragraphs,

our attention is alert and vigorous; and when we know that the writer is approaching the end, we are quickened to a new effort to catch the full meaning of his parting words. Furthermore, the mere mechanical arrangement of the beginning and the end, by a direct appeal to the eye, helps to deepen the impression made by the thought. We must, therefore, always regard the beginning and the end as strategic points and allow only the most significant matters to stand there.

Emphasis by position, however, is not limited wholly to the beginning and the end of the composition. Whether a thought comes logically at the beginning, at the end, or in the middle, there is not infrequently an opportunity to emphasize it by relative position; that is, by bringing it into contrast with some other thought. Contrast, let us never forget, is a device usually available and always effective. When we look toward a black cloud along the horizon, the white houses that dot the intervening space look whiter than they ever look when the sky is clear; the large man always seems still larger when he stands by the side of a very small man; the princess in the story takes on many new charms when she appears in the company of the hoyden; and the good deed grows in goodness when it is considered alongside the one that is mean and selfish. In describing people and inanimate objects, in telling stories, and even in explaining such matter-of-fact subjects as steam engines and chemical processes, we shall find it possible to make one thing prominent by bringing it into contrast with something that is in some essential its opposite.

B. Emphasis in the Paragraph

1. **Emphasis by proportion and sentence position.** — In the paragraph, emphasis should not afford the student unusual trouble. Since he is at liberty to make the paragraph as long as his sense of proportion will permit him to make it, he is not in any peculiar way hampered in securing emphasis by fullness of treatment. Furthermore, the organization of the paragraph

for the coherence of the whole composition provides the very kind of arrangement that contributes most to emphasis by position. In other words, the directing topic sentence at the beginning of the paragraph and the iterating summary at the end serve both coherence and emphasis. To be sure, it is not desirable to make all paragraphs small in the middle and large at each end, but the present-day tendency to give them this form helps to render emphasis by position comparatively easy. Likewise there is no special difficulty in emphasis through contrast. In truth, every means available in the whole composition may be employed on a smaller scale in the paragraph.

2. **Concentration or emphasis by emotional stress.** — In addition to these means that may be employed with equal effect in either the whole composition or the paragraph, perhaps we ought to consider another that is serviceable only in some kinds of paragraphs. This we might call concentration or emotional stress. In at least one respect it is the direct opposite of emphasis by proportion, inasmuch as it gains its effect by bringing into a compact sentence, or a few richly suggestive words in a sentence, all the meaning that could be completely expressed only in much larger space. It must always presuppose reasonable knowledge by the reader on the subject treated, and must rely upon the power of a few words to call to mind all this knowledge. To a degree it corresponds to the device that a public speaker employs when he suddenly strikes the table or makes some other positive gesture to give weight to his declaration. Or, to change the figure, it partakes of the nature of an electrical shock; the sentence brings into small compass — perhaps into figurative language — a lively charge of emotional suggestion. It may be seen, then, that the employment of this means is restricted to writing in which the emotional element can legitimately be made prominent. Thus irony, wit, humor, pathos, and sarcasm come within the method, — but never the stoically conceived matter of fact. The following paragraph is a good example. Note the penetrative character of the short sentence at the end:

It is the honest man who falls into heresy. But the latter-day sinner is sleek, orthodox, and unoffending. He conforms in everything save conduct. No one can outdo him in lip homage to the law and the prophets. It is the law-abiding who are scandalized by one another's nonconformity. They split on beliefs and practices because they care for such things. But men who take the cash register for their compass are wholly tolerant. This is why, in these times that try men's fortunes, sinners rush to one another's excuse and support one another under fire. The monopolists, small and great, local and national, grope their way to one another, strike hands, and as "captains of industry" present to their critics an unbroken front. The security jugglers from the county-seat town to Wall Street, feel that as "authors of prosperity" an injury to one is the concern of all. Adulterators and commercial crooks rally as "enterprising business men." The puppets of the Interests, from the town council to Congress, stand together as "Statesmen." On the other hand, the public they plunder, like Martha "troubled about many things," divides on race, creed, or style, pelts the non-conformist more than the sinner and lays on a little finger where it ought to wield a fist. Thus the wolves hunt in packs, while the watchdogs snap at one another.[1]

C. Emphasis in the Sentence

The demand for some treatment or some arrangement of parts that will secure emphasis within the sentence arises from one of the differences between speaking and writing. When we speak, we gain emphasis by gestures and by placing vocal stress upon important words. When we write, it is not possible for us to make use of these expedients. Yet in some manner we must produce the effects which they normally produce. What, then, shall we substitute for them? May we with impunity throw ourselves upon the intelligence of our readers by offering no substitute at all? No one, we may say, would suggest that. Yet many young writers habitually act in keeping with such a possible suggestion. They disregard their readers by writing down every sentence exactly in the form which it first takes in the mind. If they have a vague feeling that that form is not entirely effective, they resort to the much-abused expedient of underscoring all words that demand emphasis, or, in case they

[1] Edward Alsworth Ross, *Sin and Society*, p. 87 f. Houghton Mifflin Company.

have too frequent underscorings on their pages, they seek to give prominence to some of the words by writing them in capitals. Such devices are so artificial that they should be used rarely. In the end it is always better to accomplish the desired result by shifting some of the words or by completely reorganizing or remaking the sentence.

1. **Emphasis by proportion.** — Proportion as a means of emphasis within the sentence can scarcely be employed consciously with assurance of success. It is true that one kind of sentence may elevate some of its parts more clearly than other kinds do; and part of this effect is the result of proportion. Usually, however, as we shall soon see, sentence emphasis is chiefly a matter of position. Moreover, that part of it which is due to proportion may be regarded rather as the outgrowth of a well-developed feeling for thought values than as the result of any skill in handling the sentence itself.

2. **Emphasis by word position.** — The general principle underlying position as a source of emphasis assumes a special aspect when it is applied to the sentence. In every language some sentence order is recognized as the most natural one. For example, in English the subject and its modifiers usually come first, and the verb and its complements second. It is well known, too, that anything which is out of its usual position attracts more attention, favorable or unfavorable, than if it were in its accustomed place. In composition, then, any arrangement which brings a word into a position where normally it would not be expected, will, if not so unnatural as to offend taste, give the word an agreeable stress. Let us observe some sentences in which words or phrases gain emphasis by being brought into the initial position.

Blessed are the peacemakers.

"*Go!*" was the command he gave.

Here it is.

How pleasant the fields are!

With a roar the train crashed by and was soon lost to view in the distance.

Any discussion of the end of the sentence as an emphatic position resolves itself into a consideration of two types of sentence, — the periodic and the loose. A periodic sentence, as the name implies, is never complete until the end. A loose sentence is always complete at one or more points before the end. Let it be remembered for all time that neither type is inherently good or inherently bad. Sometimes one is effective, sometimes the other. In conversation, for example, we use comparatively few sentences that are periodic. We make the principal part of a remark, add one qualifying word, phrase, or clause, then another, and another, until we have produced the desired impression. In formal writing, on the other hand, we should become wearisome if we followed this conversational method. In order to keep the reader's attention, we must sometimes require him to look forward as well as backward; we must keep him in a state of expectancy until he has grasped the full thought of the sentence. We are restricted, therefore, in utilizing the end of the sentence for emphasis, by the degree of formality we wish to give to our writing. The examples which follow make clear the difference of effect that may be produced:

PERIODIC	LOOSE
If he had attended classes regularly during the second half-year, he might have passed.	He passed in two subjects, but failed in the third and fourth.
Then suddenly, cutting squarely athwart the crescendo of the floor, came the single incisive stroke of a great gong.[1]	By degrees the clamor died away, ceased, began again irregularly, then abruptly stilled.[1]
Not till the following morning would the whirlpool, the great central force that spun the Niagara of wheat in its grip, thunder and bellow again.[1]	Bareheaded young men hurried up to one another, conferred an instant comparing dispatches, then separated, darting away at top speed.[1]

Of course, when we wish to emphasize a modifier rather than the subject or the verb, it would be folly to make the sentence

[1] Frank Norris, *The Pit*. Doubleday, Page and Company.

completely periodic. Thereby we should immediately defeat our own purpose. Moreover, it is an easy matter to fall into the habit of making periodic sentences awkward and unnatural. The poet may employ a word order that is severely contorted, for he must express himself within the limitations placed upon him by the demands of rhyme and meter. But since the prose writer is not bound down by these restrictions, he should not let himself be forced too far from the natural order. He must ever be deciding between the extreme of naturalness and the extreme of emphasis, bearing in mind all the while that the only standard by which he may choose is the chief impression he desires to make.

Emphasis by contrast within the sentence is usually expressed in what is technically called a balance. The term unfortunately is often misunderstood, inasmuch as it is easy to assume that everything in the form of a balance is of necessity a contrast. As a matter of fact, it is almost as likely to be a comparison; that is, its members may be like, as well as unlike. Nevertheless, it lends itself readily to antithetical statements; and antithetical statements are always emphatic. Study the following familiar sentences from the Bible:

A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.

The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning: but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul: but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding.

When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.

Note, too, that very little of the effect is lost even when the sentence is longer:

Dryden's page is a natural field, rising into inequalities, and diversified by the varied exuberance of abundant vegetation; Pope's is a velvet lawn, shaven by the scythe and leveled by the roller.

The danger, of course, in such formal expression of contrast lies in the certainty with which it becomes monotonous. More-

over, since the balanced sentence does not admit easily of qualifying clauses or phrases, the person who employs it freely is ever in danger of saying things which are clever but which are only half true or, what amounts to the same thing, more than true.

IV. VARIETY

Sometimes a piece of writing constructed in accordance with the principles of unity, coherence, and emphasis, fails to produce an agreeable impression simply because it lacks variety. This principle, like the others we have studied, is well established. In truth, it is the one principle of life that makes existence bearable. We can toil almost ceaselessly and we can toil cheerfully if our labor is only varied; we can travel for many hours without becoming weary if the country is not all prairie; we can find pleasure in reading a very solid book if the thought is only enlivened with concrete instances and different approaches. In the field of the writer, as in other fields of work, "the one rule is to be infinitely various." Long ago, Dionysius of Halicarnassus recognized this principle when he said: "That style is best of all which has most reliefs and changes of harmony, — when part is arranged in period and part loosely; when one period is composed of many clauses and another of fewer; when of the clauses themselves this is short and that long, this aiming at nervous intensity, that more languid, a third more rigidly close to the sense; when the rhythms are different, the figures of all kinds; and when the very tensions and intonations of the voice vary so as to cheat weariness by their multiplicity." [1]

Sometimes we are led to infer that variety is only another name for naturalness and sincerity. "Goethe used to say that each poetic motive brought with it a rhythm and a stanza proper to itself; and this remark might be extended to the minutest particles of thought conveyed in language." [2] Likewise, in

[1] *De Compositione Verborum.* Quoted by Professor George Saintsbury in *Loci Critici*, p. 35. Ginn and Company.

[2] J. A. Symonds, *Essays Speculative and Suggestive*, p. 226.

the *Principles of Success in Literature*, Lewes has told us that the way to variety is through "the great cardinal principle of Sincerity." This is putting the matter simply. But the task of being sincere is, unfortunately for most of us, not to be thus dismissed with a word. We cannot express ourselves unencumbered of past experience. From our very early youth we have been influenced by memories of what other people have said, how they have said it, what they have done, how they have done it; we have undoubtedly felt the withering influence of a fear that what we were about to say or do would violate some fixed social convention; and further we have been reminded, perhaps in the most painful ways, that we cannot always succeed in making our sincere thoughts lend themselves to perfect expression in a medium that is at best imperfect. We must, then, in some manner try to gain the effect which would easily result if we could put aside echoes of other people's thought and words, throw to the winds our own self-consciousness, and magically render adequate our inadequate command of language.

A. Variety in the Whole Composition

1. Variety in approach. — In the whole composition, variety resolves itself first into a question of slight changes in one's approach to the subject-matter. Life is so complex and so many-sided, and there are so many points of view from which every physical or intellectual transaction may be regarded, that a writer who unnaturally clothes all the results of his thinking in one color or gives them one mental shape is in great danger of turning attention from the thoughts themselves to the mere fact that all of them look alike. In meeting the demands of this principle, we must, then, approach in different ways the steps in the development of the subject upon which we write. If we are employing illustrations or examples, we should sometimes state the principle, then offer the example; sometimes offer the concrete instance, then present the principle it

exemplifies; sometimes seek clarity through comparisons, sometimes through contrasts. If we are trying to give a well-rounded presentation of the subject without concrete instances, our approach should sometimes be partly or wholly negative, sometimes only positive; sometimes it should be rapid, sometimes more deliberate. In all cases we should bring into service every possible means not only of suggesting the interesting variety of life, but of reflecting whatever freshness of attitude we may possess.

2. **Variety in paragraph structure.** — Next, there must be variety in the external outlines of the paragraphs. A long paragraph produces the effect of heaviness, a short one the effect of lightness or familiar dignity; much space usually suggests great importance, brief space, little importance. The writer, therefore, who makes the nearest approach to sincerity is likely to approximate agreeable variety in this respect; for the person of sincere, honest mind unconsciously attaches different degrees of importance to his different thoughts. But if he has fallen into the habit of following the lines of least resistance in matters of structure, he will be seriously hampered in expressing sincerity. He must, therefore, give some conscious attention to paragraph length. Of course, it is not always easy to harmonize the importance of the paragraph with the space which one's structural or artistic sense may suggest, but it is usually possible. A slight reorganization, — a blending of two ideas, the division of others, a renewed effort to arrive at the best possible proportion, — will ordinarily remove much of the difficulty.

3. **Variety in transitions.** — Variety in the manner of joining paragraphs is likewise important. Here, as in the case of paragraph length, due regard for our purpose in writing will go far in preventing monotony. If we employ paragraphs to introduce, to direct, to unite, to illustrate, to amplify, and to summarize, we cannot avoid approaching reasonable variation. We may not attain it, however, if we merely push the paragraphs together as if they were so many toy blocks. And

we shall be scarcely more successful if we really make transitions, but make all of them in the same way. The reader will either find himself weary without knowing why, or he will understand the cause and condemn the writer for ignorance or carelessness. A good example of adequate variety in transitions may be found on pages 130–132 in the paragraph headings taken from Professor Gardiner's *The Bible as English Literature*.

B. Variety within the Paragraph

1. **Variety of sentence length.** — Within the paragraph the first demand of variety is that the sentences be of different length; that the reader sometimes gain the full thought only after he has been warned to accept it with qualification, and again that he come to it quickly. Occasionally this difference of sentence length is looked upon as a very pleasant literary virtue if it is the unconscious outgrowth of one's main purpose in writing, but is regarded as an artificial, mechanical device when it is the result of conscious seeking. Unfortunately, students who take this view forget that monotony wearies the reader regardless of the ease with which the writing has been done. They forget, too, that variety of sentence length need not be sought consciously while one engages in the act of writing. The sentence is such a small unit that it can usually be revised or completely recast without necessitating serious changes in its neighbors. The time, then, to give conscious attention to such details of structure is after our thoughts are safely recorded on paper. And the testimony of experienced craftsmen in almost every kind of written work is that they frequently make changes in this way solely to secure variation.

2. **Variety of sentence form.** — Secondly, variety in the paragraph demands difference of sentence form. This demand is not difficult to meet if the writer is familiar with English sentence structure, and really strives to make use of his knowledge. To begin with, much variety can be gained through the different grammatical types of sentences. Quite naturally, every writer

uses declarative sentences chiefly; but he need not restrict himself to them alone. Sometimes a declaration is most emphatic when it is expressed in the form of a question; or it may happen that either a declaration or a question can be put in the form of an exclamation. If no helpful changes can be made in any of these ways, it may be possible to effect them through the other grammatical classes, — simple, complex, and compound. If, however, we are still unable to get away from monotony, we have recourse to the making of changes in the rhetorical types, — the periodic, the unperiodic or loose, and the balanced. And should all these expedients fail, the desired effect may be gained by shifting the emphasis slightly, by substituting a fresh grammatical construction for one that has been used too frequently, or by varying the sentence cadence. In truth, there are so many ways of gaining variety of sentence form that no legitimate excuse can be offered for monotony.

Let us study two paragraphs that illustrate the agreeable effect of variety. The first shows especially difference of sentence length; the second, difference of sentence form. Every student ought to be interested, too, in the fact that the author of the second paragraph brought it into its present form by revising it for variety of sentence structure.

Charles had now a last chance of regaining the affection of his people. If he could have resolved to give his confidence to the leaders of the moderate party in the House of Commons, and to regulate his proceedings by their advice, he might have been, not, indeed, as he had been, a despot, but the powerful and respected king of a free people. The nation might have enjoyed liberty and repose under a government with Falkland at its head, checked by a constitutional opposition under the conduct of Hampden. It was not necessary that, in order to accomplish this happy end, the king should sacrifice any part of his lawful prerogative, or submit to any conditions inconsistent with his dignity. It was necessary only that he should abstain from treachery, from violence, from gross breaches of the law. This was all that the nation was then disposed to require of him. And even this was too much.[1]

The proper grading of sinners is skewed by taking into account their

[1] Macaulay, *Essay on Hampden.*

education, breeding, manners, piety, or philanthropy. The primitive tribal assembly takes an all-round view of the culprit, and the sentence it pronounces passes upon his walk and conversation as well as upon his guilt. The court of justice, however, wisely throws out such considerations as irrelevant, and narrows down to the question, "What punishment does this deed deserve?" In no other way can men be made to stand on a level before the law. Now, long ago we attained in theory the equality of all men before God, and the equality of all men before the law; but the equality of all men before the bar of public opinion is still to be achieved. No judge would dare show himself such a respecter of persons as is the public. How often clean linen and church-going are accepted as substitutes for right-doing! What a deodorizer is polite society! Who smells the buzzard under his stolen peacock plumes! Anyone can sense turpitude in the dingy "hobo," but a well-groomed Captain Kidd, of correct habits, with a family "reared in the lap of luxury" as a background, is well-nigh irresistible.[1]

C. Variety within the Sentence

In the sentence, variety requires that there be no annoying repetition of individual words. Nor may one's watchfulness be restricted to the sentences singly, inasmuch as one sentence may be free from repetition of this kind within its own limits, yet contribute to an unpleasant effect that in turn is partly produced by its immediate neighbors. The fault stands out clearly in the following example:

The rear *room* of the library is generally used for a study *room*. In this *room* are many tables with chairs around them and electric lights over them. On the west side of the *room* are shelves of *books*, mostly reference *books*.

In order to see how agreeably these sentences might be improved, compare them with any group from the quotations employed to illustrate paragraph variety, or — what would be even more convincing — rewrite them carefully.

Unpleasant repetitions are sometimes condoned on the ground that everyone has favorite words that persistently creep into his writing because they are expressive of his own character or his dominant thought. Unquestionably, an honest difficulty

[1] Edward Alsworth Ross, *Sin and Society*. This paragraph is used in this manner with the kind permission of the author.

of this kind really exists. Chaucer evidently had it in mind when he said:

> And if thou wryte a goodly word al softe,
> Though it be good, reherce it not to ofte.[1]

More frequently, however, the fault is due to carelessness or to insufficient zeal in mastering an adequate vocabulary. Thus it usually happens that the words we repeat unnecessarily are not deeply expressive either of our individuality or our subject. But, however repetition may originate, if its chief effect is unpleasantness, it should not be allowed to stand.

D. False Variety

Perhaps a word of warning should be offered. Sometimes students have such great fear of repetition that they form false notions of variety; and, unpleasant as monotony is, it is less unpleasant than variety purchased at the price of awkwardness or obscurity. At times, even noticeable repetition is justifiable. If steering away from it brings unnecessary attention to the structure of the sentence, or if it endangers clearness or seriously weakens emphasis, there should be no hesitancy in making the choice. It should never be forgotten that our aim is to approximate naturalness. As soon as variety suffers from affectation, it is to be avoided. Here, as elsewhere in our task of learning to write, we must be guided by common sense.

V. THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF THE PRINCIPLES

After a student has considered the principles of composition one by one, he may feel that they must be in irreconcilable conflict. Unity seems always to be in the way of variety, variety seems to hold out against emphasis, and emphasis seems to be equally troublesome when one strives for coherence. From one point of view, this conception is well founded. As was observed in a preceding chapter, every kind of constructive

[1] *Troilus and Criseyde*, II, 147.

work involves conflicts. It is the task of the artist, whether he engage in the making of wagon wheels, the painting of pictures, or the writing of letters or books, to reduce conflicts to harmony. And if he is skillful, he will find that what at first seemed an insurmountable obstacle in his way is in most instances a substantial aid. Thus the more serious student of composition discovers that unity is not at war with variety; variety is always within the unit. He finds, too, that very frequently the effort he makes to secure variety will result in better emphasis, and that emphasis is often the strongest ally of coherence. For example, when he inverts a sentence to relieve monotony, he may find not only that he has at the same time brought the emphatic word to the end, but that he has brought it nearer some relative pronoun or other reference word which points back to it from the succeeding sentence. Especially does he learn how closely related emphasis and coherence are. He comes to see that the distinction he gives to a prominent paragraph, sentence, or word by causing it to stand out above its neighbors will make the task of relating other paragraphs, sentences, and words to it very much easier. So it is with the principles in any combination. If he studies conscientiously and practices faithfully and long, he will sometime discover that there is in reality no unhappy conflict among them, but that instead they are interdependent and mutually helpful.

READINGS AND EXERCISES

1. Experiment with unity by developing the same topic in one paragraph and in several. Develop a paragraph from each of the sentences in the original single paragraph.

2. Note how the shifting point of view impairs the unity of the following theme. At first we think we are to see only the freshman; later, except for a glimpse in the last sentence, we see only what the freshman saw:

As seen by a Freshman

The train pulled up to the station, stopped for one impatient minute, and then rushed on, leaving a scared and bewildered freshman on the platform.

He carried a large alligator-skin valise in one hand and a sack of oranges in the other. His "highwater" trousers displayed his worsted socks and his high lace shoes. His short coat, buttoned precisely over his striped percale shirt and red tie, gave him the appearance of having been caught and suspended in mid-air by its top button.

He grasped his valise in one dangling hand and the orange sack in the other and started up the business street of the city, looking curiously about him for the noble buildings of the University. The first sign of college life seemed to be in a certain little corner building where boys and girls in couples went in at one door, and after a few minutes, came out at another. He could not, at first, decide whether it was the college library or the president's office; but upon glancing upward, he discovered the sign, "Charley's Candy Shop." Knowing that none of his studies pertained to that, he decided it must be an advanced course; so he strolled slowly on. The street seemed to be alive with boys wearing queer trousers, which made them look like walking balloons. Often they stopped to talk to groups of laughing girls, all of whom wore a kind of knitted coat, which he afterwards learned was a sweater-vest. Such sights he saw up and down every street; and, with a perplexed and confused expression on his face, he wandered on in search of college life as it was outlined in the catalogue.

3. How does the following letter violate unity?

MY DEAR SIR:

Just think of it, dad; I have passed every one of my examinations. Now you must have the new machine when I get home.

Very truly,
KITTY.

4. Find paragraphs in which repetition is employed to help coherence. What differences do you note between this kind of repetition and the kind that merely violates the principle of variety? Study this matter thoroughly. The differences are all-important.

5. How does the "be" in the following sentence help coherence?

There is division,
Although as yet the face of it *be* covered
With mutual cunning, 'twixt Albany and Cornwall.
— *King Lear*, III, 1, 19 ff.

6. Study Poe's notion of the function of the dash:

"Without entering now into the why, let me observe that the printer may always ascertain when the dash of the Ms. is properly and when improperly employed by bearing in mind that this point represents a second thought — an emendation. In using it just above I have exemplified its use. The words, 'an emendation,' are, speaking with reference to grammatical con-

struction, but in apposition with the words 'a second thought.' Having written these latter words, I reflected whether it would not be possible to render their meaning more distinct by certain other words. Now, instead of erasing the phrase, 'a second thought,' which is of some use, which partially conveys the idea intended — which advances me a step toward my full purpose, — I suffer it to remain, and merely put a dash between it and the phrase, 'an emendation.' The dash gives the reader a choice between two, or among three or more expressions, one of which may be more forcible than another, but all of which help out the idea. It stands, in general, for these words, 'or, to make my meaning more distinct.' This force it has, and this force no other point can have; since all other points have well-understood uses quite different from this. Therefore the dash cannot be dispensed with. It has its phases, its variation of the force described; but the one principle — that of second thought or emendation — will be found at the bottom of all."

Try to gain a similarly definite notion of the part played by the other marks.

7. When Phillips Brooks prepared a sermon he decided first how many pages he was to use; then how many pages each of the large divisions of his subject would require; and finally, how much space this scale would enable him to devote to each of the smaller divisions. After he had once decided, he made every division come within the limits he had fixed. In this way he secured good proportion. Study his method in Allen's *Life of Phillips Brooks*. Little, Brown, and Company.

8. Why did the audience laugh when a very earnest orator misquoted Garfield's well-known words in this manner: "God reigns, and the government still lives at Washington"?

9. Are you sure that you know the difference between variety and lack of unity? What is the difference?

10. Do not be misled into thinking that every paragraph is constructed in every respect according to all the principles we have studied. These principles set up an ideal toward which every good writer strives; but he does not always attain unqualified perfection. Study the paragraphs in some of your assignments in history or English literature. What writers are especially careful in the structure of their paragraphs? How frequently do you find transition or summary paragraphs?

CHAPTER V — THE PROCESSES OF COMPOSING[1]

THE matters which we have considered in the preceding chapters are but essential parts of preliminary preparation for writing. Knowledge of material, mastery of a working vocabulary, and grasp of the principles which underlie structure are not consecutive steps in the completion of a given piece of writing, but are parts of the general scheme of training to which one must submit before one may hope to do writing of any kind with the highest degree of success. Essential as these acquirements are, they are not writing itself. It is not enough to have individual bits of material, to know individual words, and to be skilled in individual principles; we must not be "aiming to be an architect by learning to make bricks." Instead, we must be able to focus all this preliminary knowledge in the one complex activity which we call composing.

The first great good that we derive from studying the processes of composing is some knowledge of what composing is and what it is not. Very frequently students are discouraged in their attempts at writing because they do not know when they are composing well. If they find that ideas come slowly, and that they cannot make easy progress in organizing what they have to say, they at once spring to the conclusion that they were not born to write, and give up in despair. Unfortunately, too,

[1] In attempting to guide students to a truer understanding of what composing really means, the authors have not relied solely upon their own comparatively slight experience. They have drawn from evidence left by many writers who are no longer living, and have secured very complete information specially for the purpose from a half hundred well-known authors of the present time. This list includes writers of fiction, of drama, of literary essays, and of instrumental essays and treatises. Since the chapter must of necessity be rather general, it cannot include all these specific views. It contains nothing, however, which conflicts with the spirit of any of the information received.

some writers of literature and some teachers have helped to perpetuate this misconception. They have misled many students into believing that efforts at writing are hopeless unless the writer can strike out boldly, and, with an ease given by the gods, set down at once in perfect form the knowledge, opinions, or feelings that he may have on any subject. Poe observed this misconception a half century ago:

"I have often thought how interesting a magazine paper might be written by any author who would, that is to say, who could, detail, step by step, the processes by which any one of his compositions attained its ultimate point of completion. Why such a paper has never been given to the world I am much at a loss to say, but perhaps the authorial vanity has had more to do with the omission than any one other cause. Most writers, poets in especial, prefer having it understood that they compose by a species of fine frenzy, an ecstatic intuition, and would positively shudder at letting the public take a peep behind the scenes at the elaborate and vacillating crudities of thought; at the true purposes seized only at the last moment; at the innumerable glimpses of idea that arrived not at the maturity of full view; at the really matured fancies discarded in despair as unmanageable; at the cautious selections and rejections; at the painful erasures and interpolations, — in a word, at the wheels and pinions, the tackle for scene-shifting, the step-ladders and demon-traps, the cock's feathers, the red paint and the black patches which, in ninety-nine cases out of the hundred, constitute the properties of the literary histrio." Although Poe had in mind the professional literary writer, his observation applies in even greater degree to the work of the amateur and the mere novice.

What does it mean to compose? Let us begin at the beginning. Let us remind ourselves at the outset that ideas and images are not stowed away in the mind as so many labeled packages ready for use, but that they come to our consciousness in broken, seemingly unorganized form, and in varying degrees of clarity; that our mental powers are not always under our complete

control; that the words we have brought into our working vocabularies from the national word stock may not express adequately all shades of meaning; and that the demands of the principles of composition are rigorous. When we compose, then, we look upon experience that has no very definitely fixed limits, draw upon knowledge which in certainty and vividness ranges all the way from the very certain to the borderland of the unknown, and, with mental powers partly under our control and partly controlling us, select from a number of verbal symbols the ones which, when brought under the molding force of a few principles, will suggest to other people our thoughts on the little center of life that we have singled out. But let us look at the matter in another way.

I. LIMITATION OF THE SUBJECT-MATTER

When we try to analyze our mental experience, we find that it is very difficult to go back to the real beginning of our constructive thinking on a subject. Sometimes the title of a book, the mere sight of an epigrammatic sentence in our reading, a direct suggestion by one of our associates, or a personal experience that brings a sudden clearer vision of some condition with which we have long been familiar, will quicken us to seek new relations and new conclusions. Sometimes we gradually become aware that we have rather definite opinions on a subject without knowing just when we formed them. Or it may be that the subject has been assigned to us for investigation, and that our first knowledge of its probable extent has come only with the suggestion that we write upon it. In any case, our first conscious steps are faltering and uncertain. We slowly feel our way along in the darkness, not knowing whether the steps we take will lead us to new related ideas or whether they will lead us entirely away from our subject. In truth, even our purpose is not very definite when we begin working, although at the time we may think it is. We cannot really know the purpose we have until we have some knowledge of the whole field in which it is included,

and we cannot really know this field until after purpose has directed us. Thus we have one rather tentative purpose, then another slightly modified by new knowledge and, perhaps, our regard for our prospective readers, then another, and then another, until we have focused all our knowledge and experience at one point. Only then do we feel that our purpose has become definite and final. All this cannot be brought to pass speedily. After we have thought upon our subject initially, we perhaps put it aside for a time. When we take it up again, we find that our notions have become firmer and the limits of the subject more definite. Gradually, as a result of our continued effort, we begin to separate our subject from the thousand others with which it is related in some way, but not significantly for our purpose, until at last it stands apart with enough clearness to enable us to summarize it in a sentence or a phrase.

We need not go far afield for an example. Let us suppose that a student who has been in college long enough to begin to wonder why he is there should become interested in trying to express his views on what college is for. On the one hand, he has heard many college graduates say that courses of study really helped them less than association with other students, "standing by the team" when the team needed support, and participating in a score of purely complementary activities, such as fraternity life, the glee club trips, and amateur theatricals. Or it may be that these men attached much importance to incidental reading in the library or to personal association with some of their teachers. On the other hand, he has heard men regret that they spent so much of their time with purely incidental matters and wish that they might live their college days over again solely to gain more benefit from courses of study. They say, too, perchance, that if they only had another opportunity to elect courses, their elections would be made without regard to the amount of work the courses required. The student sees that the definite expressions of belief by these two classes of men must be well founded, but he knows that neither can be wholly true for all students. The

thought which he gives to the matter slowly clarifies his mind until he is sure that he knows at least what he wants to write about. As a result of his effort to decide upon a title, he reaches the conclusion that what he wants to say would fall readily under the heading, " What a College Education should do for a Student."

II. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SUBJECT WITHIN THE LIMITS FIXED

This phrasing of the writer's purpose marks a full step in making the limitations of his field more distinct. But there yet remains the task of developing the subject within these limitations. In order to ascertain whether he is thoroughly familiar with the ground he desires to cover, he asks himself what specific benefits a student should gain from a college education. At first these things do not come to his mind in any very logical order, but he jots them down lest they slip away. Some of the suggestions, he notices, are definite and specific, others are vague and general; some are closely personal, others are more or less impersonal. Possibly he finds, too, that they overlap seriously. His list doubtless looks much like this one:

WHAT A COLLEGE EDUCATION SHOULD DO FOR A STUDENT

Train the mind.
Develop the habit of study.
Develop confidence.
Give one a degree of finish.
Develop one socially.
Prepare one for a specific occupation or calling.
Enlarge one's view of life.
Acquaint one with world affairs.
Give one a knowledge of liberalizing subjects.
Enable one to form valuable acquaintances among one's fellows.
Prepare one for the professional school.
Develop the power of organizing thought.
Improve one morally.
Make one a patriotic citizen.

Acquaint one with foreign languages.
Give one an aim in life.
Develop the willingness and power to serve.
Increase one's personal influence.
Develop taste.
Develop originality.
Enable one to express oneself well in writing.
Acquaint one with one's own national and state government.
Develop one's sense of honor.
Provide one with an opportunity to specialize.
Enable one to learn how to know men.
Provide one with a fund of working knowledge.
Develop a feeling of responsibility.
Develop power of concentration.
Enable one to meet and converse with strangers easily.
Cultivate observation.
Cultivate intellectual curiosity, — the desire to know.
Enable one to enjoy life more fully.
Develop one physically.
Enable one to speak in public with confidence.
Increase one's powers of imagination.
Prepare one to appreciate scholarship later in life.

III. THE PLAN

Putting the material into words in this way marks another step in the actual work of composing. To be sure, the inevitable overlappings prevent a clear view of the field; and even when they have been reduced, some of the material refuses, at least at first, to be classified. Furthermore, there are many shadowy and indistinct lines of demarcation between thoughts that as wholes seem to be distinct; or, if the writing is narrative, there are many troublesome questions about sequence. But gradually, under the influence of persistent thought, the ideas become so firm and the divisions and sequence so clear that the writer is able to bring all the results of his thinking into more or less completely organized form. Then he is ready to test the organization by reducing it to some kind of written plan.

Now it is undeniably true that students sometimes have a pronounced aversion to making plans in any formal way. Such

supposedly mechanical procedure they regard as of little benefit to one who is ambitious to write spontaneously and fluently. But their position, it scarcely need be said, is quite unfounded. It rests on the false belief that good writers and great writers do not make plans. Schopenhauer has spoken in his characteristic manner about this false notion and the ineffectiveness that results from it:

"Few write in the way in which an architect builds; who, before he sets to work, sketches out his plan, and thinks it over down to its smallest details. Nay, most people write only as though they were playing dominoes; and as in this game the pieces are arranged half by design, half by chance, so it is with the sequence and connection of their sentences. They only just have an idea of what the general shape of their work will be, and of the aim they set before themselves. Many are ignorant even of this, and write as the coral insects build; period joins to period, and Lord knows what the author means." [1]

But the few who write well, the few whose work has the distinction of artistic merit, do give much attention to the making of plans. Probably not all of them regard the outlining of their work as of so much importance as Racine did in constructing his plays,[2] yet they know that a large part of any piece of writing is finished when they have worked out the plan in detail. It is true, of course, that some authors do not always make a written plan; but they hold a plan definitely in mind, — a thing which the young writer is usually unable to do. It must be said, too, that the writers who have found it possible to "write the plan out in the mind" have ordinarily learned to do so by making written plans earlier in their lives. Through practice they have developed the power to see so easily and so

[1] Schopenhauer, *On Style*. Translated by T. Bailey Saunders. Published in *The Art of Literature*. George Allen and Company, Limited.

[2] Racine préparait soigneusement celui de ses pièces, acte par acte, d'abord, puis scène par scène, et, quand il avait terminé ce travail, il disait: "Ma tragédie est finie, je n'ai plus que les vers à écrire!"

— A. Vannier, *La Clarté Française*, p. 48.

clearly that they simply do not put themselves to the trouble of writing the plan out on paper. Of course, in the informal personal essay, such as Dr. Crothers and Miss Repplier delight us with, there is little need of a plan, because there is no desire to give close logical organization to the completed essay. It is purely a literary ramble, meant to justify itself not by the end reached, the destination arrived at, but by the pleasant views along the way. In other kinds of writing, however, — in the instrumental expository essay, in argumentation, in the story, the biography, and the drama, — the need of a careful plan confronts every writer; but especially the one who is inexperienced.

A. The Need of a Plan

The need of a plan is twofold. In the first place, the writer should have a guide and a fixed record of his purpose, just as workers in other arts have, and for the same reason. The painter draws a sketch in pencil before he makes his picture, the sculptor makes his model on paper or in clay before he begins to work on the marble, and the architect makes drawings of every detail of his building and perhaps, in addition, a reduced model of the whole, before the first step is taken in its erection.

> Image the whole, then execute the parts —
> Fancy the fabric
> Quite, ere you build, ere steel strike
> Fire from quartz,
> Ere mortar dab brick ![1]

Likewise the writer should have "that architectural conception of work, which foresees the end in the beginning and never loses sight of it, and in every part is conscious of all the rest till the last sentence does but, with undiminished vigor, unfold and justify the first."[2] Secondly, the writer has special need of a plan because of one peculiarity of his work. Unlike the product of the architect, the sculptor, or the painter, a com-

[1] Browning, *A Grammarian's Funeral.*

[2] Pater, *Style.*

pleted piece of writing cannot be seen in its entirety at one view or in a series of independent views. It is progressive and cumulative, and if the writer hopes to make it easy for his readers to keep every important part in mind till they reach the end, he himself must first have perfect knowledge of the way.

B. The Making of the Plan

1. The running outline. — It is useless to make over-nice classifications of plans, and it is folly to say that any one kind must always be used. A plan, it should be remembered, is only a means to an end. Whenever, therefore, a student turns his attention to studying the refinements of a score of differently labeled plans, he is quite likely to be turning his mind from the real business in hand to a mere incidental. The extent to which we may profitably carry out the details of a plan depends upon our grasp of the material to be treated, the kind of material, and our habits of mind. If we hold the subject-matter firmly, and can see it in all the relations of its parts with ease, a mere running outline may be sufficient. To return to our example, the material on the benefits to be derived from a college education might stand thus:

WHAT A COLLEGE EDUCATION SHOULD DO FOR A STUDENT

1. Enforce habits of study.
2. Cultivate concentration.
3. Create a fund of knowledge.
4. Develop a sound body.
5. Create respect for economy.
6. Acquaint one with religious and ethical thought.
7. Teach one the duties of citizenship.
8. Develop the power and the willingness to serve others.
9. Teach one how to know men and women.
10. Create a feeling of responsibility.
11. Enable one to form lasting friendships.

2. The expository plan. — The running outline, however, shows only selection and sequence. If we desire to gain some

view of the proportion of the parts and of all their direct and indirect relations, we should employ the expository plan. Through a simple system of numerals this kind of plan gives a logical view of everything to be included in the completed composition. Let it be observed, however, that it does not indicate paragraphs; it merely provides a test by means of complete analysis. Our material, then, might stand in this form:

WHAT A COLLEGE EDUCATION SHOULD DO FOR A STUDENT

I. A college education should develop intellectual power.
   A. By enforcing habits of study.
   B. By cultivating the ability to concentrate the mind.
   C. By creating a fund of working knowledge.
II. A college education should establish character.
   A. By developing a sound body.
   B. By creating a respect for economy.
      1. In the use of time.
      2. In the use of energy.
      3. In the use of money.
   C. By acquainting one with religious and ethical thought.
   D. By teaching one the duties of citizenship.
   E. By developing the power and the willingness to serve others.
III. A college education should increase one's social influence.
   A. By aiding one in learning how to know men and women.
   B. By creating a feeling of responsibility.
      1. To oneself.
      2. To one's associates.
   C. By enabling one to form lasting friendships.

3. **The summary plan.** — We may choose to go a step further and submit the organization of our material to a test by summary. That is, we may bring the material for each paragraph into the form of a sentence. This summary plan tests the unity of the paragraph and the coherence of the whole composition. It is especially valuable, because it not only enables the writer to see the order and proportion of his proposed piece of work, but indicates the ease or difficulty with which he can make transitions from paragraph to paragraph. The four or five

summary headings printed below will serve to show the character of this kind of plan.

WHAT A COLLEGE EDUCATION SHOULD DO FOR A STUDENT

I. Inasmuch as every conception of education implies mental grasp of some kind, the first purpose of a college education should be to develop intellectual power.
II. The beginning of this power lies in the enforced systematic study that a college education requires.
III. It is further increased through the resultant ability to concentrate the mind.
IV. Again, it is increased through the enlarged fund of working knowledge with which organized study provides the mind.
V. Etc., etc.

C. The Plan as a Test

Not only does the plan help us to see our way more clearly; it enables us to make a preliminary test of everything that goes into our writing, and thereby saves us the necessity of undue revision. In the first place, the plan offers a test of the completeness with which we have covered our ground. In the essay, the argument, the description, or the story, we cannot be certain that there are no gaps, no unbridged chasms, no insecure ground, until after we have displayed our material on paper in some way. The plan is the simplest means of making this display. Moreover, it tests the relevancy of subject-matter. We have seen in an earlier part of this chapter how our mental experience is interwoven and interrelated until it is difficult to separate any part of it from the rest. Now when we bring some of this experience together for treatment in a piece of writing, we are always in danger of drawing with it some matter which is only indirectly related to our chief idea, or not related at all. The opportunity which a plan affords for seeing a wide field in small compass makes it comparatively easy to throw out this irrelevant matter. Again, we can test the consistency of material and of organization. If we do not make a plan we may not discover any conflict of ideas, any violations of coördina-

tion or subordination, until we read over the pages of the first draft of the completed composition; but we are very certain to detect them if they are displayed even in part in the divisions of an outline of some kind. It scarcely need be added that all departures from logical sequence are likewise easily detected when the thought-order is represented on paper.

But probably the greatest single advantage in making a plan lies in the opportunity it affords to harmonize emphasis and symmetry. When we write, we are not free to devote as much space to a division of our subject as we may desire, or as it seems to merit when considered alone; nor may we always give it the prominence of position which for the moment it seems to demand. We must keep in mind its comparative importance and the part which it must contribute to the symmetry of the whole composition. The problem is the same one that the architect encounters in making the plans of a dwelling house. He must have a certain number of rooms, they must be of different sizes according to the uses to which each is to be put, and they must be so arranged in a group that they shall serve the convenience of everyday life. The kitchen must be close to the dining room, the dining room must be close to the living room, the library must be convenient to the living room, and the parlors must not be far from either the living room or the dining room. With a due regard for all these demands, the architect must plan a house pleasant to behold. Its exterior must be as complete and artistic as its interior is convenient. In a similar way, the writer must harmonize proportion and position with symmetry.

IV. THE ACT OF WRITING

The putting of ideas on paper is such a complex activity that it leads many people to believe that the genius alone can write — at least write well. The genius is the man who sees an infinite number of relations at once. When he directs his mental powers upon a subject which comes within the range of his interest, ideas crowd upon him for expression until his pages are rich

with the aptness and completeness of his thinking. Because of his interest in his subject, his whole being is aglow. But he never lets the heat break forth into a flame. Now this power of concentration tempered with this sympathetic restraint is the fundamental demand in reducing thought to paper. We must see things in the large; we must be able to look at the whole range of our proposed piece of writing and see at a glance all the relations of the coördinate and subordinate parts, so that, as we write, everything we have in mind on the subject will come into our full consciousness when it is needed. The ability to do this, — the ability which the genius possesses conspicuously, — all of us possess in some degree. It depends, let it be observed, upon alertness and a complete command of our mental powers; and these, in turn, depend largely upon conditions that we can control.

A. The Time to Write

The first of these conditions is time. Unquestionably we are ready to write at some times and are not at others. When are we ready? To begin with, we are ready only after a period of time has elapsed since we first thought on the subject, and if possible, since we finished the plan of our work. Young writers are often misled into believing that they are full of ideas on a subject as soon as it is suggested to them; and all of us, regardless of age, occasionally have the feeling immediately after a subject has been presented to us in a fresh way that we have much to say on that subject. But we are rarely ever ready to write at these times when the mind seems full and the way seems clear. The stimulation of the new thought is beguiling. The truth is, our first ideas on a subject, though they may be essentially sound, are usually covered with very much light froth and foam. If we hope to have a full, clear stream of thought, we must give it time to flow away from its immediate origin and take into its own existence a hundred tributary streams. Or, to change the figure, we must brood over our

ideas until they become self-sustaining and vigorous. Almost without exception, writers of full experience testify that they carry their " seed ideas " in mind for months and years before they put pen to paper in an effort to express them. " We say, I will walk ' abroad ' and the truth will take form and clearness to me. We go forth but cannot find it. It seems as if we needed only the stillness and composed attitude of the library to seize the thought. But we come in and are as far from it as at first. Then, in a moment and unannounced, the truth appears. A certain wandering light appears and is the distinction, the principle, we wanted. But the oracle comes because we had previously laid siege to the shrine." [1] Of course, it may be said that hurried composition is frequently necessary, as in writing for daily newspapers. But writing of this kind, though it may serve its immediate purpose admirably, always leaves an impression of its transient nature. Writers who hope to have a more permanent consideration of their work usually try to have their original ideas and their original plans enriched and reënforced by the sure increase which comes with the mere passing of time.

Moreover, the time to write must be considered from another point of view. After we have enriched our material by holding it in mind and thinking over it for a period, there is still for each of us a best time to write, — some time when our minds are fresh and free. For most people, this best creative period is in the morning. Occasionally we learn of a writer who does his work in the quiet of the night, but most writers who " burn the midnight oil " exist only in the imagination. As much may be said, too, about the authors who write only when the " mood " leads them irresistibly to their desks. The creative mind, whether it gives itself to mechanical or electrical invention or to writing, must depend for its sustenance on the same physical food and rest that give renewed vigor to the mind busied with bookkeeping or farming. We ought not to be surprised, then, to learn that writers who live regular lives get up in the morning and begin their work very much as other people do. On some

[1] Emerson, *Intellect.*

days they find that work goes easily, and on others that it drags heavily, just as it does in other occupations. Nevertheless, they work on. Of the half hundred writers who contributed their experience to this chapter, all except one said they did their work regularly in the morning. The one exception said he learned to write at night while he was in a newspaper office, and had not changed his practice. He thought, however, that the practice he had followed was a bad one and that it should be avoided. Only two of these fifty writers said they were directed to their work by a "mood," and these two were writers of poetry. With these exceptions, all said they took little account of moods. After they were once fully convinced that they had mastered their material, they went to their work morning after morning until it was finished. "I am an unfortunate creature who cannot indulge in the leisure and luxury of moods." "I have no time to recognize moods of any sort." "I take little account of moods." "After I have begun, moods play very little part." "I never wait for 'mood.'" "Waiting for a mood is useless, — at least for me." These are representative testimonials from men and women who write as their chief business in life. To be sure, they were unanimous in saying that their effectiveness varied noticeably, that on some days the result of their efforts required very little revising, while on others it was very unsatisfactory; yet they were, with the two exceptions previously noted, equally a unit in saying that they did not for this reason confine their work to the times when they felt as if they could do unusually well. By their testimony we are brought to the conclusion that consciously or unconsciously they follow Dr. Johnson's advice not to "wait for the afflatus," but, when their minds are renewed through sleep, "to sit down doggedly." Such a method tends to create the very state of mind necessary to the most effective writing.

B. The Place to Write

Likewise the place in which we do our writing must be regarded as a circumstance of some importance. Although it is folly

to confuse absence of thinking with an inauspicious room or desk, some consideration of place is necessary. In writing, as in the doing of other kinds of work, we should have good light, reasonable quiet, and plenty of fresh air. These conditions, too often regarded solely as subject-matter for committees on hygiene, are sometimes as important to a student as his knowledge of the cardinal principles of composition. If he would work most advantageously, he must have regard for them.

Other conditions are sometimes developed to serve as special inducements to easy expression, but they usually embody only some one's mere whim, or supply some self-created demand. They are, then, of comparatively little importance. It probably does not help the student of composition very much to know that Dickens and Ibsen always kept idols on their tables in order that they might visualize more clearly; that Schiller kept overripe apples in his desk and frequently sat with his feet in a basin of cold water; or that Young stuck a candle in a skull before him for the purpose of producing the desired "atmosphere." Knowledge of this kind is for the curiosity seeker, not the young writer. If we have distributed the study of our subject over a reasonably long period of time, if we make ourselves comfortable and write when we are normally at our best, we may feel that we have met the important external conditions of the act of writing.

C. The Proper Attitude toward the Principles of Composition

A perplexing problem which confronts the learner when he sits down to write is that of making the principles of composition, — unity, coherence, emphasis, and variety, — serve him in any practical way. He supposes that they are of some value since he is required to study them laboriously; but when he tries to think of the principles while he is writing, he finds that he is thereby hindered in what he wants to say, and is in almost as sorry a plight as if he had never heard of them. This state

of mind is due to a misconception of the purpose of studying the principles. As we have already been led to notice, constructive work of any very high kind requires a blending of the natural and the artificial according to certain laws or usages which time has established. Now the student of composition must be willing to work patiently to accomplish this result in his writing. He should be as free as possible from the consciously analytical while he is writing, yet all the time he must be influenced and limited by fundamental principles. What, then, should be his attitude toward them? In answering the question we should bear in mind at the beginning that things need not be a part of our full consciousness in order to influence us; that much of the work we do daily is done subconsciously or even through mere habit. If, then, through analysis and through preliminary practice we master the principles of composition so thoroughly that they are always associated in our minds with the work of writing, they become "second nature" to us, and guide us and limit us without requiring our conscious attention.

This subconscious influence of well-mastered knowledge is clearly seen in other kinds of constructive work. In learning football a student must master a number of distinct things which he knows will be of use to him at some time. He is taught how to catch the ball, how to carry it, how to hold it when he passes it to a teammate, how to run low, how to tackle, how to fall so as to save himself from injury, and how to execute plays according to a code of signals. Probably he is bewildered at first, and wonders how he shall ever be able to think of so many things at one time; but after he has practiced only for a season or two, he finds that he can give his whole conscious attention to the concrete problems of a particular contest, yet all the while play according to the established principles of the game. The student of singing likewise must gain this preliminary mastery of the principles of his art. As he labors patiently to master voice placement and tone production, he may think that he will never be able to sing if he must forever keep these trying matters

in mind; but after he has mastered them thoroughly he gives his conscious attention almost solely to the interpretation of the song. Probably we remark that he is delightfully natural, although we are aware all the while that his singing is very different from that of the untrained voice. His experience, and the experience of learners in every other art, ought to help the student to see how he should make use of the principles of composition while he is engaged in the actual work of writing.

The whole matter is well summarized in the following words: "Let no man think to improve in his working by any knowledge that can be taken up or laid down at will, any means or appliances from without. All improvement in the creation must first exist in the creator. Say not to the artist, write, paint, play, by such and such a rule, but *grow* by it. Have you literary principles? — write them in your leisure hours on the fleshly tables of the heart. Have you theories of taste? — set your brain in idle time to their tune. Is there a virtue you would emulate, or a fault you would discard? — gaze on spare days upon the one till your soul has risen under it as the tide under the moon, or scourge the other in the sight of all your faculties till every internal sense recoils from its company. Then, when your error is no longer a trespass to be condemned by judgment, but an impiety at which feeling revolts — when your virtue is no more obedience to a formula, but the natural action of a reconstructed soul — strike off the clay mold from the bronze Apollo, throw your critics to one wind and their sermons to the other, let Self be made absolute as you take up your pen and write, like a god, in a sublime egotism, to which your own likes and dislikes are unquestioned law." [1]

D. The Function of the Plan

This consideration of the subconscious influence of well-mastered principles ought to throw some light on the use we should make of outlines while we are writing. Not infrequently

[1] Sydney Dobell, *The Palladium*, September, 1850.

students raise objections to the making of written plans because, they say, a plan makes one's writing stiff and unnatural, and drives one to say things which were not intended. Here, as in the case of the supposedly troublesome principles, the tyranny is not due to any inherent wrong in the plan, but to the careless thinking which the student did when he made it. He has, in other words, not made a plan at all, but merely a group of headings to satisfy in a perfunctory way a requirement with which he is sure he is not in sympathy. Of course, it would be too much to say that the plan should never be changed after one begins to write. It is to be followed with fidelity, but with intelligence; and intelligence is sure to see the necessity of occasional changes. There are some problems of structure and transition which even the most experienced craftsmen do not see until they arrive at the actual business of committing their words to paper; but the more carefully the plan is worked out, the fewer of these will present themselves for solution. And in any event the changes to be attempted after one begins to write ought not to extend beyond comparatively small details. The plan ought to give general form, and give it clearly and definitely. It can perform this function, too, without projecting unpleasantly through to the surface like the bones of a starved horse, if the writer really has anything to say on the subject he has reduced to a plan. "The true way to get rid of the boniness of your sermon is not by leaving out the skeleton, but by clothing it with flesh." [1] If we only bear in mind that the plan is a plan, but nothing more, we shall find it a source of clear direction; not a tyrannous master, but a friendly guide.

E. The Utilization of Notes

Not the least care of the writer while he is at his work is the handling of notes. If they have been made as the result of his own observation or his own thinking, his only task is to bring them into the current of the thought he is trying to express.

[1] Phillips Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching*, p. 178. E. P. Dutton and Company.

Yet he cannot often "write them in" just as they stand. Usually he finds that he must rephrase and reëmphasize them, since in bringing them in bodily he always encounters the danger of making patchwork. If they have been made from reading, this danger is even greater. In truth, many students seem to believe that a piece of writing based upon printed sources consists merely of a sufficient number of fragments brought together in some semblance of logical order. Putting aside the fact that this method often resolves itself into mere stealing, it is surprisingly injurious to the one who employs it. It reduces him to a mere puzzle-maker who works only with incomplete blocks from the perfected designs of other people. Thereby he dulls his own creative powers and weakens his ability to think consecutively, so that he becomes less and less able to do independent work. As was pointed out in Chapter II, the only legitimate use of printed sources, except when we desire quotations or statistics, is as a beginning for thinking of our own. When we employ them in this way we violate no legal or moral copyright, and the resulting thoughts fit themselves easily into our piece of work for the very simple reason that they are really original with us. "Originality consists in power of digesting and assimilating thoughts, so that they become part of our life and substance. Montaigne, for example, is one of the most original of authors, though he helped himself to ideas in every direction. But they turn to blood and coloring in his style, and give a freshness of complexion that is forever charming."[1]

F. The Writer's Regard for his Audience

It might seem that with an unfailing regard for the substance to be treated in a piece of composition, and with either a conscious or subconscious consideration of all the things that we have seen must enter into composing, the writer would have more than his mind could grasp at one time or in rapid succession

[1] Lowell, *Thoreau.*

and recurrence. Nevertheless he must, in addition, keep a more or less definite audience in mind during every moment of the act of writing. It is true that, through forgetfulness, we sometimes look upon writing solely as self-expression, and think only of "saying the thing." But saying it to whom? We must not wander away from the fundamental idea that writing is communication. To have no audience in mind, or to have different audiences in mind at different times in the writing of the same composition, is to court misunderstanding and indifference. On the other hand, to have an audience steadily in view stimulates the writer through the imaginary response he gets from his prospective readers, makes clearness more certain, and guarantees a unity of tone that can scarcely be gained in any other way. The influence of the audience is well summed up in these words from Emerson: "The scholar sits down to write, and all his years of meditation do not furnish him with one good thought or happy expression; but it is necessary to write a letter to a friend, — and forthwith troops of gentle thoughts invest themselves, on every hand, with chosen words." [1]

V. REVISION

A. Reasons for Revision

When we have reflected upon the many demands made of the writer while he is engaged in the act of writing, we can see at once the necessity of revising. While he is employing his creative powers it is impossible for him to bring everything at once into final form or final place. As a matter of fact, the concentration and the grasp required are so great that even the most experienced and most skillful find that errors, weaknesses, and omissions are always frequent in first drafts. They accept as a mere matter of course the task of revising. They revise in order to render self-expression more perfect — by making the expression one with the thought — and to render the communica-

[1] *Friendship.*

tion more effective by making the thought more easily comprehensible. In spite of this fact, students frequently look upon revision just as they sometimes look upon the making of a plan, — as a process that possibly has value for the dullard and the plodder, but none for the mentally alert who want to express themselves spontaneously and sharply. And yet the truth is, the quality of a writer's product may usually be known from his attitude toward revision. Much of the finest and brightest in what one has to say comes clearly into view only through patient rewritings. De Quincey is frequently looked upon as a genius who could write without great effort; yet notice how the *English Mail Coach* was brought into its final form: "An interleaved copy, crowded with De Quincey's corrections . . . was set up by the printers for Hogg; but the author was not yet satisfied; he went again to work; dealt with the proof sheets as if they were first copy; omitted, added, and emended; again interleaved some pages with blank paper, which again are crowded with alterations in his dainty and scholarly handwriting And some of the most striking effects of his lofty and elaborate rhetoric were reached only in the final revision." Or hear the modest, convincing confession of Newman, one of the most skillful masters of English prose: "It is simply the fact that I have been obliged to take great pains with everything I have written, and I often write chapters over and over again, besides innumerable corrections and interlinear additions. I am not stating this as a merit, only some people write their best first, and I never do. . . . However, I may truly say I have never been in the practice since I was a boy of attempting to write well, or to form an elegant style. I think I have never written for writing's sake, but my one and single desire and aim has been to do what is so difficult, viz., to explain clearly and exactly my meaning; this has been the whole principle of all my corrections and rewritings."[2] To-day, as in the days of Augustus, Horace's

[1] Professor Edward Dowden, *How De Quincey Worked*. *Saturday Review*, Feb. 23, 1895 (Vol. 79, p. 246).

[2] From a letter.

words hold true: "You who intend to write what is worthy to be read more than once, blot frequently." [1]

B. Self-criticism in Revision

Revision implies self-criticism. The freedom that was important in the act of writing now ceases to be a literary virtue. When the substance and the elusive spirit of our thought are written down so that they cannot slip away from us, we must subordinate our creative powers to the critical, and strive to find every imperfection our work contains. For a time we must exercise directly upon everything we have written the dispassionate scrutiny of the most critical audience. If we have not cultivated this power of self-criticism, we ought to set about the task at once. No writer's confidence in himself can be very intelligent until he can see his work as others see it, and know from their point of view that it possesses merit. Otherwise it is as if a painter could see how his picture looked only from the position he occupied when he painted it, and not from that of the spectator.

1. **Essentials of self-criticism.** — For its efficacy self-criticism must always depend upon an unbiased second approach to one's work. "In his self-criticism he [the writer] supposes always that sort of reader who will go (full of eyes) warily, considerately, yet without consideration for him." [2] Thus it is important, especially in writing which is very personal, that a reasonably long period should elapse between writing and revising. Of course, we cannot always put work aside in this way and take it up again only after we have centered our attention on other matters for several days, yet we do not approach an ideal method of working until we can. Only when our minds have become cold to the details that occupied our attention while we were writing can we receive the definite new impression of the scores of little weaknesses that must be remedied merely

[1] *Satire X.*
[2] Pater, *Style.*

by inserting a phrase or word, reorganizing a sentence, or abridging a paragraph.

Further, profitable self-criticism depends upon our conscious understanding of the principles and mechanical devices of writing. While we write they must be kept in the background; but when we are ready to criticize our work, they must be brought into the foreground and used consciously as tests. Thus if our paragraphs are not clear-cut, we may discover the fault by applying tests for unity, coherence, or emphasis. If the whole composition seems flat and lifeless, a test for variety may reveal the secret of its ineffectiveness. Furthermore, if we find that the piece is in the main effective but slightly unnatural in spots, we frequently may remove the unpleasant part of the impression merely by changing the position of a word, by finding a more acceptable idiom, or even by removing or adding a semicolon or comma. But these changes must be made intelligently; we cannot produce desirable effects unless we have acquired skill in the use of our tools; we must not only be able to do a thing, but we must know how we do it and what the effect will be if we do it in some other way.

In addition to the unbiased second approach and this mastery of principles and mechanical devices, one thing further is essential to the most effective self-criticism; namely, patience in labor. Revision is a very difficult task. It is not enough, therefore, to be in a proper state of mind to receive truthful impressions and to know how to distinguish between weakness and strength; we must be persistent in following up the advantage which training and the mere lapse of time have given us. It is true that we are sometimes tempted sorely to call a piece of work finished and try to get away from it as soon as we have made a fairly readable copy; but yielding to this temptation is likely to be fatal. We must stand ready to go over our work a dozen times, if the twelfth revision will correct one error or bring out more clearly one fundamental idea. "The only thing to do is to work on over each attempt until you have put into it the best you have to give, and then grow some more

during the work on your next effort," says one well-known writer. "I revise until I have done the best I can, always," says another. "Sometimes, of course, I find that revision has not improved what I first wrote, and then I go back to it; but mainly I revise until the printed book is on my table, and then I see clearly for the first time how much more I should have revised." Another: "I revise a great deal, and have always done so. Nothing comes easy to me." Another: "Everything I have published has been written from four to eight times. In my earlier life I revised rather more than I do now." Still another: "I generally revise every serious thing I write two or three times; everything I put in book covers, four or five times." If the experience of a lifetime has taught such persistence and patience to those who are favored with special ability, it would seem that any learner ought to be willing to follow up every opportunity he has for improvement, before he says his writing is the best that he can do.

2. **Aids to self-criticism.** — Every student who goes about his work thoughtfully will soon discover various means of aiding himself in revision. Inasmuch as everyone must have certain methods that are distinctly his own, it would be useless to try to enumerate all of them here; but two or three of them are used so universally and are so easily employed that no one who has the least interest in his work should fail to take advantage of them. The first of these is the reading of some kind of good literature immediately before beginning criticism. This practice has at least two good effects. First, it clarifies the mind. Our mental life is so complex and is ordinarily such a medley of essentials and non-essentials that it is difficult for us to see things of our own creation in their true perspective. But if we turn our attention to some writer who has succeeded in giving his reader only the essentials, — who has himself skillfully exercised the power of selection, — we are helped surprisingly in gaining the clear, organized mental condition we desire. Again, this practice provides us with high literary standards, and as a result we are better fitted to judge our own work.

Instead of having only the vague, incomplete standards which have resulted slowly from years of reading and study, we have these general standards sharpened and brought to point. Thereby we are enabled to compare our own product with the definite impression of something that possesses unquestioned merit.

The second of these aids is the reading of our manuscript aloud. Since language is naturally addressed to the ear, much of our success in its use, even though we address it to the mind through the eye by writing it upon paper, will depend upon the presence or absence of those qualities which belong to the best speech. There is, then, no surer way of making a test for these qualities, or, on the other hand, for those that militate against them, than by addressing our writing to our own ears. In this way we can easily detect abrupt or awkward transitions from paragraph to paragraph or from sentence to sentence, weakness or undue abruptness in sentence endings, and, above all, those unnecessary repetitions of phrases and individual words which usually characterize with unfailing certainty the work of the inexperienced craftsman.

This reading aloud to oneself may often be supplemented by reading to another person. The truth is, after we have thought upon a subject for a long time, it is difficult for us to tell whether or not our discussion of it will be as clear to other people as it is to ourselves. The terms we use may not be familiar to them; we may have taken for granted too much knowledge on their part; and we may have reached conclusions without expressing all the necessary steps in the process. These matters we cannot easily determine in what we have written ourselves, because the ground we have covered is so thoroughly familar to us that we can readily follow our own thought processes over it without any written guide at all. We do not, therefore, see how another might easily stumble. As soon, however, as we read to some friendly critic who is good enough to listen to us, all these dark, rough, or unbridged places appear. "What do you mean there?" he asks; "I don't understand that." "That paragraph isn't as good as the

preceding one." "I never heard that word before." "Your sentences are too choppy; they go along in rub-a-dub-dub style." "Better leave that word out; I don't like it." "I think the paragraph ought to be toned down." Such remarks set us to thinking anew. The other person's point of view enables us to see how far we were from saying what we really meant to say.

C. Changes to be Attempted in Revision

From what has been said thus far we ought to begin to see what changes we may attempt in revision with assurance of success. On account of the fact that the subject-matter of a given piece of written work must be reasonably well in hand before we can commence writing with any degree of intelligence, there are few opportunities to change the material after it has been committed to paper. Of course, it is often possible to condense some parts and amplify others, and to supply omissions. Nevertheless, bodily subtractions and additions are always dangerous to sequence and consistency. Likewise comparatively little should be attempted in structure, except in sentences or clauses. It is not wise, then, to write with the hope that if we do not feel satisfied with what we say, we can shift our paragraphs a few times and have another coherent organization. We may, however, sometimes rearrange the sentences in a paragraph for emphasis, coherence, or variety, and we may very easily change individual sentences in order to emphasize words, to bring modifiers into position, or to bring pronouns close to their antecedents. But the greatest opportunity for effective revision always lies in the details of diction. Nouns that do not express the thought accurately may be displaced; adjectives and adverbs may be studied and improved; colorless verbs that merely indicate action may be put aside for those which have color and express a particular style or kind of action; and prepositions and conjunctions may be rechosen to make thought relations more explicit.

But what, it may be asked, are we to do if we find that the

first draft of our writing demands more sweeping changes than these? There is but one answer: we should put aside what we have done and begin a new copy, writing quite independently of the first one. It is probable that the increased familiarity with our subject-matter that has come with the writing of the first copy will enable us to write a second one that we can revise effectively. If, however, it has not, we should begin again and make yet another. It is not at all an unusual experience for the most skillful writer to make three or four, or even a half dozen different copies of his work. Such procedure may seem to be out of harmony with the statement that most writers plan their work carefully; but it is not. The struggle from the first vague conception of a group of ideas up through the mists toward definiteness and clarity is so exacting and so uncertain that we must always strive as if we were at the limit of our power, yet take for granted the possibility of being required to fall back and begin again, even with greater exertion. Thus we try to reach perfection in the plan we make, again in the act of writing, and yet again in revision or rewriting. Every step in the development of the written product should be an effort at finality, yet each succeeding step should be an assumption that the preceding one had possibly fallen short. Only thus may we hope to approach reasonable perfection. Many rewritings may not be required, but if they are, we should never shrink from them.

D. Dangers in Revision

It is scarcely necessary to say that there are dangers in revision. The constant effort which we make to destroy crudity and imperfection may at the same time destroy freshness. Moreover, the repeated application of the mind to the details of writing may result in the loss of perspective, — the ability to see the work as a whole, the parts in their relations to one another. Furthermore, too long continued exercise of the powers of analysis and criticism may result in a temporary paralysis of the creative faculty, which, as we have seen, must

be subordinated during self-criticism. That many of us, however, should injure ourselves in any of these ways is such a remote possibility that the dangers need not be dwelt upon at length. If we are only aware that such dangers exist, it is not likely that they will cause us serious trouble.

VI. VARIATIONS IN THE PROCESSES OF COMPOSING

In turning away from this discussion of the processes of composing, it might be well to remind ourselves that in practice there are great variations in these processes. They should not be looked upon as formulas which will inevitably bring certain results under all circumstances. A mastery of them implies enough creative intelligence to see that they vary according to the kind of composition which one writes, and according to the person who employs them. Thus we find that the material of instrumental composition lends itself more definitely to the rigid divisions of a plan; that the cardinal principles are more clearly evident in instrumental composition, just as the lines in mechanical drawing are sharper than those in landscape painting; and, usually, that less may be done in revision if the writing is wholly instrumental than if it is wholly æsthetic. Thus, too, every student must learn for himself which of the processes involved in composing contributes most to the perfecting of his work. Some writers give infinite pains to the preliminary steps and write with great deliberation, thereby making the necessity of revision slight; others, because their minds refuse to work with much deliberation, find that they must write down rapidly whatever they have to say, then by revision fill up the gaps and round out the incomplete parts; still others fall so far short of expressing their purpose the first time, that they must cast aside what they have done and begin again, — this time, of course, with their purpose more definitely worked out in their own minds. But, whatever adaptation it may be necessary to make, the way in all its essentials remains unchanged. In some proportion there must be

preliminary thinking, preliminary planning, full concentration in the act of writing, and the severely self-critical attitude in revision.

READINGS AND EXERCISES

1. The following quotations are typical of a large number of replies that men and women of letters made to inquiries concerning their methods of working. Do you find in them any justification for the methods you employ?

"My ideas pass through every stage of development from an indecipherable jotting on an envelope to a sentence, a paragraph, a section of an article."

"I always carry a notebook or a piece of paper with me, on which I jot down during the day such ideas as occur to me. If it is an important idea, I find it will turn up again and again in moments of leisure. Every time, however, the idea is likely to occur to me in some new form, and in this way it connects itself with other ideas and with practical problems I have in hand; and by and by I find that I have by this means gathered material enough for an article or a speech."

"My own practice in regard to creative writing is to carry a subject in my mind for a long time, studying it and meditating upon it, and then to write almost extemporaneously. The first part of a story that comes to me is usually the opening scene. Sometimes even the opening sentence or paragraph comes entire. In that case I am likely to write it down in a notebook, and then to keep the story by me, thinking and dreaming about it from time to time for two, or three, or even five, years until I know the whole story from beginning to end. Then I try to tell it in writing. Sometimes I succeed at the first effort, sometimes at the third or fourth, and sometimes not at all. It is never clear or vivid enough to satisfy me. The dream is always better than the reality; but I do not find that revision often improves it. If it is too bad, the best way is to put it in the fire and begin all over again."

"In preparing an essay, lecture, book review, or in planning a critical volume, I find an outline plan highly advisable. The plan is, of course, modified more or less; but it makes for unity, without which there can be no art."

"Revision is a *sine qua non* for any self-respecting literary work. If there be no self-criticism after the creative activity has cooled, there can be no assurance of right form — and form is essential."

"After I have put a thing in shape, I lay it aside for a few days and dip into writers like Carlyle, Emerson, Arnold, Renan, Kipling, Victor Hugo,

so that when I take the thing up for final revision, I can test it by standards of real literature."

"After I have obtained a rough draft containing what I want to say, I turn it over to some one else to get his corrections and criticism. Whenever I have had anything very important to say or write, I have found it good policy to hand over this first draft to the most critical person I could find, and in some cases to many different persons. In this way I have obtained valuable suggestions which have helped me to give form to what I wanted to say."

2. Take some large subject, such as Saint-Gaudens's Sculpture, Intercollegiate Sport, or Scientific Business Management, and limit it in different ways. Narrow it down to one specific aspect, then another, and then another. In this manner you will be able to see how many possibilities one subject has. You will see, moreover, how it is possible to make the same material do legitimate service under a wide variety of purposes.

3. There is no better way to gain the power of analysis and orderly thinking than by *thinking after* writers who possess this power in a high degree. If, therefore, you feel the special need of improving yourself in this respect, read and outline the writings of good thinkers. For example, make an expository plan of Huxley's *Yeast* or Greenough and Kittredge's *Learned Words and Popular Words.*

4. Study the changes which Lowell made in the poem *Phœbe,* even after he had sent it to R. W. Gilder for publication. Four letters containing suggested changes followed it all the way from London to New York. See the *Letters* of James Russell Lowell, Vol. III, p. 82 ff. Houghton Mifflin Company.

5. If you read French, examine Antoine Albalat's *Le Travail du Style.* In it you will find profitable reading, and many examples of skillful revision.

6. Keep the different drafts of your themes, bring them to conference with you, and let your instructor compare them. In this way he will be able to give you many helpful suggestions about planning, writing, and revising. Study the changes that were made in the second draft of the paragraph printed below:

The day was cold and blustery. The wind was blowing hard and the air was filled with fine, icy snow that cut one's face until it burned. Frozen snow creaked under a

The day was cold and blustery. The wind was blowing hard, and the air was filled with fine, icy snow that cut one's face until it burned. It was the kind of day that makes a

man's feet as he walked over the ground. It was the kind of day that makes a person want to stay in the house. Standing at a window I saw an old man, with his arms full of bundles, picking his way cautiously along the slick street. He went toward a rig which was tied near, and on reaching it, dumped his bundles on to the floor of the klondike buggy. Then, turning up his collar, brushing the sleet from his overcoat, and kicking the snow from his shoes, he climbed in. After he had piled his packages on the seat beside him and tucked in the robe so no cold could get beneath it, he picked up the lines, spoke to his horse, and started to drive off. The horse took but one step and stopped. It was still tied to the post. The old man kicked the robe loose and crawled out of the buggy, upsetting the pile of bundles as he did so. He jerked the tie strap loose from the post and climbed back into the klondike without bothering to kick the snow from his shoes. With a savage jerk on the lines, he shouted at his horse and drove off down the street.

person want to stay in the house. While I stood at my window I saw an old man, with his arms full of bundles, making his way cautiously along the street toward a klondike buggy which was tied near by. On reaching it he dumped the bundles on to the floor, turned up his collar, brushed the sleet from his coat, carefully kicked the snow from his feet, and climbed in. After he had piled his bundles on the seat beside him and tucked in the robe snugly so that no cold could get beneath it, he picked up the lines, spoke to his horse, and started to drive off. The horse took but one step and stopped. It was still tied to the post. Scowling, the old man kicked the robe loose and crawled out of the buggy, upsetting the pile of bundles as he did so. He jerked the strap loose from the post and climbed back, this time without bothering to kick the snow from his shoes. With a savage jerk on the lines, he shouted at the horse and drove rapidly off down the street.

7. In order to see how the tone of writing can be changed by simple revision, examine President Lincoln's corrections of the following diplomatic dispatch, written by W. H. Seward, Secretary of State, to C. F. Adams, Minister to Great Britain. After Mr. Seward studied the President's revisions, he prefixed two short introductory paragraphs which rendered unnecessary the omission of the last two. Note that the revisions make the dispatch more agreeable in tone. It remains dignified and firm, but it suggests less of unfriendly feeling.[1]

[1] Nicolay and Hay's *Abraham Lincoln, Complete Works*, Vol. II, pp. 48–51. The dispatch is also printed, with slight variations, in the same authors' *Abraham Lincoln: A History*, Vol. IV, pp. 270–275. The Century Company.

(*All words by Lincoln in margin or in text are in italics. All matter between brackets was marked out.*)

Department of State,
Washington, May 21, 1861.

Mr. Dallas, in a brief dispatch of May 2 (No. 333), tells us that Lord John Russell recently requested an interview with him on account of the solicitude which his lordship felt concerning the effect of certain measures represented as likely to be adopted by the President. In that conversation the British secretary told Mr. Dallas that the three representatives of the Southern Confederacy were then in London, that Lord John Russell had not yet seen them, but that he was not unwilling to see them unofficially. He further informed Mr. Dallas that an understanding exists between the British and French governments which would lead both to take one and the same course as to recognition. His lordship then referred to the rumor of a meditated blockade by us of Southern ports, and a discontinuance of them as ports of entry. Mr. Dallas answered that he knew nothing on those topics, and therefore could say nothing. He added that you were expected to arrive in two weeks. Upon this statement Lord John Russell acquiesced in the expediency of waiting for the full knowledge you were expected to bring.

Mr. Dallas transmitted to us some newspaper reports of ministerial explanations made in Parliament.

You will base no proceedings on parliamentary debates further than to seek explanations when necessary and communicate them to this department. [We intend to have a clear and simple record of whatever issue may arise between us and Great Britain.] *Leave out.*

The President [is surprised and grieved] *regrets* that Mr. Dallas did not protest against the proposed unofficial intercourse between the British government and the missionaries of the insurgents [as well as against the demand for explanations made by the British government]. It is due, however, to Mr. Dallas to say that our instructions had been given only to you and not to him, and that his loyalty and fidelity, too rare in these times [among our late representatives abroad, are confessed and], *are* appreciated. *Leave out because it does not appear that such explanations were demanded.* *Leave out.*

Intercourse of any kind with the so-called commis-

sioners is liable to be construed as a recognition of the authority which appointed them. Such intercourse would be none the less [wrongful] *hurtful* to us for being called unofficial, and it might be even more injurious, because we should have no means of knowing what points might be resolved by it. Moreover, unofficial intercourse is useless and meaningless if it is not expected to ripen into official intercourse and direct recognition. It is left doubtful here whether the proposed unofficial intercourse has yet actually begun. Your own [present] *antecedent* instructions are deemed explicit enough, and it is hoped that you have not misunderstood them. You will in any event desist from all intercourse whatever, unofficial as well as official, with the British government, so long as it shall continue intercourse of either kind with the domestic enemies of this country [confining yourself to a delivery of a copy of this paper to the Secretary of State. After doing this] *When intercourse shall have been arrested for this cause*, you will communicate with this department and receive further directions.

Leave out.

Lord John Russell has informed us of an understanding between the British and French governments that they will act together in regard to our affairs. This communication, however, loses something of its value from the circumstance that the communication was withheld until after knowledge of the fact had been acquired by us from other sources. We know also another fact that has not yet been officially communicated to us — namely, that other European States are apprised by France and England of their agreement, and are expected to concur with or follow them in whatever measures they adopt on the subject of recognition. The United States have been impartial and just in all their conduct towards the several nations of Europe. They will not complain, however, of the combination now announced by the two leading powers, although they think they had a right to expect a more independent, if not a more friendly, course from each of them. You will take no notice of that or any other alliance. Whenever the European governments shall see fit to communicate directly with us, we shall be, as heretofore, frank and explicit in our reply.

As to the blockade, you will say that by [the] *our own* laws [of nature] and *the laws of nature* and the laws of nations this government has a clear right to suppress insurrection. An exclusion of commerce from national ports which have been seized by the insurgents, in the equitable form of blockade, is the proper means to that end. You will [admit] *not insist* that our blockade is [not] to be respected if it be not maintained by a competent force; but passing by that question as not now a practical, or at least an urgent, one, you will add that [it] *the blockade* is now and it will continue to be so maintained, and therefore we expect it to be respected by Great Britain. You will add that we have already revoked the exequatur of a Russian consul who had enlisted in the military service of the insurgents, and we shall dismiss or demand the recall of every foreign agent, consular or diplomatic, who shall either disobey the Federal laws or disown the Federal authority.

As to the recognition of the so-called Southern Confederacy it is not to be made a subject of technical definition. It is, of course, [*quasi*] direct recognition to publish an acknowledgment of the sovereignty and independence of a new power. It is [*quasi*] direct recognition to receive its ambassadors, ministers, agents, or commissioners officially. A concession of belligerent rights is liable to be construed as a recognition of them. No one of these proceedings will [be borne] *pass* [*unnoticed*] unquestioned by the United States in this case.

Hitherto recognition has been moved only on the assumption that the so-called Confederate States are *de facto* a self-sustaining power. Now, after long forbearance, designed to soothe discontent and avert the need of civil war, the land and naval forces of the United States have been put in motion to repress the insurrection. The true character of the pretended new State is at once revealed. It is seen to be a power existing in pronunciamento only. It has never won a field. It has obtained no forts that were not virtually betrayed into its hands or seized in breach of trust. It commands not a single port on the coast nor any highway out from its pretended capital by land. Under

these circumstances Great Britain is called upon to intervene and give it body and independence by resisting our measures of suppression. British recognition would be British intervention to create within our own territory a hostile state by overthrowing this republic itself. [When this act of intervention is distinctly performed, we from that hour shall cease to be friends, and become once more, as we have twice before been forced to be, enemies of Great Britain.]

Leave out.

As to the treatment of privateers in the insurgent service, you will say that this is a question exclusively our own. We treat them as pirates. They are our own citizens, or persons employed by our citizens, preying on the commerce of our country. If Great Britain shall choose to recognize them as lawful belligerents, and give them shelter from our pursuit and punishment, the laws of nations afford an adequate and proper remedy [and we shall avail ourselves of it. *And while you need not to say this in advance, be sure that you say nothing inconsistent with it.*]

Happily, however, her Britannic Majesty's government can avoid all these difficulties. It invited us in 1856 to accede to the declaration of the Congress of Paris, of which body Great Britain was herself a member, abolishing privateering everywhere in all cases and forever. You *already* have our authority to propose to her our accession to that declaration. If she refuse to receive it, it can only be because she is willing to become the patron of privateering when aimed at our devastation.

These positions are not elaborately defended now, because to vindicate them would imply a possibility of our waiving them.

We are not insensible of the grave importance of this occasion. We see how, upon the result of the debate in which we are engaged, a war may ensue between the United States and one, two, or even more European nations. War in any case is as exceptionable from the habits as it is revolting from the sentiments of the American people. But if it come, it will be fully seen that it results from the action of Great Britain, not our own; that Great Britain will have decided to fraternize with our domestic enemy, either

Drop all from this line to the end, and in lieu of it write, "This paper is for your own guidance only, and not [sic] to be read or shown to anyone."

without waiting to hear from you our remonstrances and our warnings, or after having heard them. War in defense of national life is not immoral, and war in defense of independence is an inevitable part of the discipline of nations.

The dispute will be between the European and the American branches of the British race. All who belong to that race will especially deprecate it, as they ought. It may well be believed that men of every race and kindred will deplore it. A war not unlike it between the same parties occurred at the close of the last century. Europe atoned by forty years of suffering for the error that Great Britain committed in provoking that contest. If that nation shall now repeat the same great error, the social convulsions which will follow may not be so long, but they will be more general. When they shall have ceased, it will, we think, be seen, whatever may have been the fortunes of other nations, that it is not the United States that will have come out of them with its precious Constitution altered or its honestly obtained dominion in any degree abridged. Great Britain has but to wait a few months and all her present inconveniences will cease with all our own troubles. If she take a different course, she will calculate for herself the ultimate as well as the immediate consequences, and will consider what position she will hold when she shall have forever lost the sympathies and the affections of the only nation on whose sympathies and affections she has a natural claim. In making that calculation she will do well to remember that in the controversy she proposes to open we shall be actuated by neither pride, nor passion, nor cupidity, nor ambition; but we shall stand simply on the principle of self-preservation, and that our cause will involve the independence of nations and the rights of human nature.

I am, sir, respectfully, your obedient servant,

W. H. S.

Charles Francis Adams, Esq., etc., etc., etc.

8. Study the different versions of the last paragraph of Lincoln's First Inaugural Address. They are printed in Nicolay and Hay's *Abraham Lincoln: A History*, Vol. III, pp. 343–344.

9. Notice the ways in which writers acknowledge indebtedness. Some do it as a part of the act of writing, specifying the indebtedness incidentally in the text, some prefer footnotes, others try to make every acknowledgment in the preface, and still others print lists of sources at the end of each chapter or at the end of the book. No one method is best. The matter of importance is that acknowledgment should be made in some way, honestly and cheerfully.

CHAPTER VI — EFFECTIVENESS IN COMPOSITION

When a writer has written, how is he to measure his success? Is his own opinion to be accepted, regardless of the impression he makes on his reader? Or is the reader's opinion to be taken as final? Or is there some fixed standard of workmanship by which every piece of writing can be judged? We have only to realize that writing is fundamentally communication, in order to see that success cannot be measured in any single, detached way. In every instance there is something which some one is saying to somebody in some manner. For one to affirm, " My writing is clear, because it is clear to me," or " Because I am interested in this, it must be interesting," is just as absurd as for a man who is talking through a telephone to decide for himself that he is speaking distinctly. The person " at the other end " in either case must be considered. Similarly it is impossible for any reader to determine whether a writer has expressed himself with complete accuracy and perfect fidelity to his artistic ideals. Very often readers have been satisfied when the writer could not be, or readers have demanded what the writer could not sincerely give. Finally, it is difficult to see how any particular piece of writing — an editorial, a short story, or an essay — can be judged effective in itself and by itself, since, in spite of all the speculations of the critics, truth and interest and beauty must remain relative. They are too personal ever to be absolute. The fact is, then, that there can be no sound testing of a writer's product which does not take into account the other factors in communication besides the writer; namely, the material, the reader, and the form.

I. THE WRITER AND THE MATERIAL

The first test has to do with the writer and his material. It is assumed, of course, that before he attempted to write he had

something to say, something which seemed to him true and interesting and well suited to the particular conditions of his writing. But beyond this, was he really prepared? In all reason, there can be no satisfactory communication unless a writer has his material well enough in hand to make what he says intelligible and reliable. He may be ever so much interested in his subject and ever so eager to write about it; but mere enthusiasm cannot fit him for his proposed work. To be aroused by some outrage perpetrated in the name of union labor or to have one's pity stirred by the sight of filth and hunger in a city tenement is by no means adequate preparation for an article on trade unionism or a story about life in the slums. Real mastery of material such as is indispensable to effective communication requires that the writer know his subject completely, that he work it over in his mind until it becomes transparently clear, and that he catch the larger view of his facts or characters through the illuminating and vitalizing power of imagination.

A. Full Knowledge of the Subject

Without doubt mastery of a subject begins in full knowledge. In the first place, as was shown in an earlier chapter, the writer must gather his material with the utmost accuracy and thoroughness. To ride along Broadway in a "Seeing New York" automobile or to visit the Stock Exchange no more gives a complete knowledge of the New York business world than would a little promiscuous reading of magazine articles or encyclopedias. And yet many writers, not willfully unscrupulous, thus come short of really knowing their subjects. A scientist will lack the patience to carry his research far enough to make his results conclusive, or a magazine writer will prefer to substitute imagination for industry in working through an array of statistical facts which a government census report offers, or a novelist will be in such a hurry that he does not live with his characters until he understands them. Moreover, full knowledge will often require more than a thorough understanding of a specific

subject; deep special knowledge must be supported by some acquaintance with related subjects. It was this essential which Macaulay had in mind when he objected to a certain life of Addison. He said that the author was not well acquainted with her subject, and added: "No person who is not familiar with the political and literary history of England during the reigns of William the Third, of Anne, and of George the First, can possibly write a good life of Addison." It was a realization of this same need of intellectual background which led Parkman in preparing to write his *Montcalm and Wolfe* not only to go over all available books and papers on his subject and to seek out much unpublished data, but also to visit every spot where events of importance occurred and observe such scenes as might help to illustrate those he meant to describe.[1] Similarly our confidence in the work of Jane Austen is due to the fact that back of her pictures of a few families there is full understanding of the whole life lived in the English villages of her day. Of course, it is unreasonable to insist that a writer must always be an expert on the subject he presents, yet there is perfectly good ground for Goethe's demand: "I have guesses enough of my own; if a man write a book, let him set down only what he knows."[2] And the knowledge which will permit effective writing includes both complete knowledge of a given specific matter, and, lying back of this, a well-rounded store of general knowledge.

B. Clear Thinking

The mastery of a subject involves more than full knowledge. The writer must also think his material through clearly. He must know his objective point, and see the parts in their true relations. It is easy to understand how this applies to logical composition. Everyone expects an argument to be thought out with careful exactness before it is written, and there is a plain necessity for equally straight thinking in explanations of com-

[1] Parkman, *Montcalm and Wolfe*, p. ix.

[2] Quoted by Emerson in his essay on Goethe in *Representative Men.*

plex ideas and processes. For how can a reader ever find his way through material which the writer himself has never mastered to the extent of thinking through it directly and luminously? And in stories, essays, and sketches, no less than in writing that is more strictly intellectual, there must be distinctness of thought back of every other characteristic quality. It is a safe hazard that Lamb knew what he was about in writing his charmingly informal pieces, just as surely as did Burke in constructing his convincing speech on Conciliation with the American Colonies. Not that on Lamb's part there was necessarily any conscious calculation, any written outline; yet his impressions were definite, and he felt the exact relation of one bit of material to the rest. To be sure, many persons, either deliberately or through weakness, write without being clear in their own minds about their subject. Professor Bates puts it well: "Just as a beetle bangs his clumsy thick head against a window or a netting in hope that he may chance to strike a place where he can get through to the lamp within, so the June-bug writer goes banging absurdly down his page, bumping against any obstacle, trusting to fate and the chapter of accidents to show somewhere and somehow a way through." [1] But what these persons write is always confused, if not chaotic. There is no reason to expect that what is so blurred in their minds will ever be sharply distinct for their readers. It may not be wise to say that once a writer has thought straight about his subject, the writing will nearly take care of itself,[2] but effective expression does depend so much upon clear thinking that we may fairly insist upon the writer's having his material well crystallized in his own mind. Cobbett's rather blunt advice is thoroughly sound: "Sit down to write what you have thought, not to think what you shall write."

As a corollary to this idea it is important to recognize that ordinarily clear thinking is concrete thinking. It may be that trained philosophers can handle ideas in the abstract — al-

[1] Arlo Bates, *Talks on Writing English*, First Series, p. 94.

[2] See *Power to Think Straight*, in the *Nation*, Vol. 91, p. 333.

though they usually find it best to begin with the concrete and the particular and then proceed to the abstract and the general — but unquestionably the great majority of people need to think in concrete terms. To do otherwise leaves the way open for all manner of vagueness and uncertainty. The truth is that we all live with the concrete and in the concrete. Except through it we do not really know anything abstract. A child does not understand gracefulness in the abstract until it sees some concrete embodiment of grace, — perhaps kittens at play, or gulls floating in the air, or willows swayed by the wind. A student of economics does not really understand a theory of wages until he sees how that theory affects the wages of a barber in New York or a carpenter in Chicago. Neither does the college freshman understand the traditions of honor in his college until he sees how this honor appears in the treatment of visiting athletic teams and the keeping of laboratory notebooks. A writer, therefore, cannot know his subject well until he has cleared away all vagueness and forced his ideas into concrete terms. Here are two examples from prominent thinkers which show how well they mastered their material before attempting to present it. It is hardly possible that their work would have been effective if they had done no more than discuss the nature of government or the moral equivalent of war in an abstract way.

A large part of mankind still regard governments as something quite apart from the main business of life, something which is undoubtedly necessary to enable them to attend to their business, but only incidental or accessory to it. They plow and sow and harvest; they manufacture and buy and sell; they practice the professions and the arts; they write and preach; they work and they play — under a subconscious impression that government is something outside all this real business, a function to be performed by some one else with whom they have little or no concern, as the janitor of an apartment house whom somebody or other had hired to keep out thieves and keep the furnace running.

The essential feature of the present condition is that the burden and the duty of government rest on all men; and no man can retire to his business or his pleasures and ignore his right to share in government without shirking

a duty. The selfish men who have selfish interests to subserve are going to take part; the corrupt men who want to make something out of government are going to take part; the demagogues who wish to attain place and power through pandering to prejudices of their fellows are going to take part. The scheme of popular government upon which so much depends cannot be worked successfully unless the great body of such men as are now in this room do their share; and no one of us can fail to do his share without forfeiting something of his title to self-respect.[1]

There is nothing to make one indignant in the mere fact that life is hard, that men should toil and suffer pain. The planetary conditions once for all are such, and we can stand it. But that so many men, by mere accidents of birth and opportunity, should have a life of nothing else but toil and pain and hardness and inferiority imposed upon them, should have no vacation, while others natively no more deserving never get any taste of this campaigning life at all, — this is capable of arousing indignation in reflective minds. It may end by seeming shameful to all of us that some of us have nothing but campaigning, and others nothing but unmanly ease. If now — and this is my idea — there were, instead of military conscription a conscription of the whole youthful population to form for a certain number of years a part of the army enlisted against Nature, the injustice would tend to be evened out, and numerous other goods to the commonwealth would follow. The military ideals of hardihood and discipline would be wrought into the growing fiber of the people; no one would remain blind as the luxurious classes now are blind, to man's real relations to the globe he lives on, and to the permanently sour and hard foundations of his higher life. To coal and iron mines, to freight trains, to fishing fleets in December, to dish-washing, clothes-washing, and window-washing, to road-building and tunnel-making, to foundries and stoke-holes, and to the frames of skyscrapers, would our gilded youths be drafted off, according to their choice, to get the childishness knocked out of them, and to come back into society with healthier sympathies and soberer ideas. They would have paid their blood-tax, done their own part in the immemorial human warfare against nature, they would tread the earth more proudly, the women would value them more highly, they would be better fathers and teachers of the following generation.

Such a conscription, with the state of public opinion that would have required it, and the many moral fruits it would bear, would preserve in the midst of a pacific civilization the manly virtues which the military party is so afraid of seeing disappear in peace. We should get toughness with callousness, authority with as little criminal cruelty as possible, and painful work done cheerily because the duty is temporary, and threatens not, as

[1] From an address by Mr. Elihu Root, Yale Univ., May, 1907.

now, to degrade the whole remainder of one's life. I spoke of the "moral equivalent" of war. So far, war has been the only force that can discipline a whole community, and until an equivalent discipline is organized, I believe that war must have its way. But I have no serious doubt that the ordinary prides and shames of social man, once developed to a certain intensity, are capable of organizing such a moral equivalent as I have sketched, or some other just as effective for preserving manliness of type. It is but a question of time, of skillful propagandism, and of opinion-making men seizing historic opportunities.[1]

C. Imaginative Quickening

Finally, if a writer is to master his material in the fullest sense, he must give it a certain imaginative quickening. To be sure, the writer who knows his subject thoroughly and has thought it over until it has become crystal clear can do much useful writing. What he says will be reliable and intelligible. But as there is no full intellectual power without imagination, so there can be no real mastery of material without it. When the need of an imaginative touch is urged upon the scientist or the historian, he sometimes interprets the counsel as sanctioning a degree of untruth in his work. Of course nothing of the sort is intended. The real point is that unless the writer who presents facts has the imagination to catch a larger view of these facts, to see them in their larger relations, he must miss their larger significance. Although he can offer an accurate and clear record, he can help his reader to no new vision. In the same way, the narrative writer who has merely brought a few characters into interesting situations may be able to afford his reader some amusement. But unless he has mastered his characters in the sense that they have become for him real persons fitting into the drama of life, he cannot tell a story that will be the source of abiding inspiration. In any kind of composition the fullest effectiveness demands that the writer bring his imagination to bear on the material until it is illumined and vitalized. Only then is he ready to address his reader.

[1] William James, *The Moral Equivalent of War.*

II. THE WRITER AND THE READER

Readiness to write avails nothing, however, unless a writer conveys to some one else the material he has mastered; communication of any sort is "a double-ended process." In reality every piece of composition constitutes a problem in applied psychology. It is by the writer's personal attitude and skillful methods of presentation that he must succeed in making whatever he has to say reach his reader. The words, "Get your man!" which football and basketball coaches are continually ringing out in practice, might well be adopted by the writer. It may be that in rare instances a reader's voluntary attention can be taken for granted; in such cases, accuracy and clearness will be enough to make the writing acceptable. For instance, one who reads an article in an encyclopedia must get certain information, and he is satisfied if he finds it in intelligible form. But far more often a writer has to earn his right to be read. Whether he tell a tale of personal experience, or sketch his impression of a winter landscape, or urge some plan for civic betterment, he must make what he has to say concern some one other than himself. Much writing goes unread simply because authors feel neither inclination nor obligation to consider their readers. The common fault with the writing which scientists and other experts do for the general public is that it either bores or confuses. And occasionally a novelist like Henry James, or a dramatist like Ibsen, or a poet like Browning, who has a really valuable idea to convey, fails to make himself understood because he does not hold his reader in mind as he writes. On the other hand, the need of winning the reader may be so imperative that the writer is betrayed into serious compromises of good taste, or into loose handling of truth. The business writer who must keep his sales letter out of the wastebasket until his prospective customer has read it, the editor who must get his newspaper read widely enough to attract advertising, the magazine writer who wants to popularize the facts of science, — all these are in constant danger of losing full

effectiveness because they think too much of catching their reader's passing interest. There is, then, a very nice balance to be struck between indifference and catering. The effective writer must win and hold his reader, but he must do it without sacrificing either material or good form.

A. The Attitude of the Writer

Without doubt a writer's attitude has much to do with his success in reaching readers. Any conscientiousness, any enthusiasm, any high seriousness, any strength on his part will be subtly but unmistakably communicated to the reader and will inspire in him an eager and confident attentiveness. On the contrary, just as soon as the writer shows any disposition to treat his work indifferently or any tendency to handle his ideas or situations inadequately, the reader feels it and becomes correspondingly more difficult to reach. Every writer, therefore, must ascertain how his own spirit of work can aid him in enlisting his reader's attention.

1. **Devotion to clearness.** — Usually the first thing that impresses a reader favorably is the writer's devotion to clearness. Brunetière has characterized the good writer as one who says all he means to say, says only what he means to say, and says it exactly as he means to say it; and Mr. Arnold Bennett has remarked that "the great convenience of masterpieces is that they are so astonishingly lucid." And yet this quality of transparency, this "electric communication from writer to reader, with the least possible resistance," is by no means easy of attainment. Anyone who has had the slightest experience with serious composition knows that the English language can prove itself a very stubborn and even inadequate medium. To succeed at all in presenting his material, a writer must have a devotion to clearness amounting almost to a passion. He insists on eliminating all obscurity, not alone because he craves exact self-expression, but also because he wants to convey his idea to his reader with the utmost accuracy and lucidity.

And to attain this crystal clearness he is willing to take infinite pains. He will hold himself to the closest thinking. He will wrestle with the language to make it convey his meaning unmistakably. But more than all else, he will strive to understand his reader. The very foundations of clearness lie in intelligent sympathy. When by conscientious endeavor he can take his reader's point of view, think with his reader's mind, and realize the interests which grow out of his reader's experiences, his writing will go straight to the mark. Thus Dr. Charles Cuthbert Hall, who spoke with notable effectiveness in India on certain aspects of Christianity, spent several months at Oxford studying the literature of the Orient in order that he might understand the mental attitude of the people whom he was to address. The same careful effort to meet the intellectual needs of the audience is evident in the following statement which appears in the preface of William James's *Talks to Teachers on Psychology:*[1] "I have found by experience that what my hearers seem least to relish is analytical technicality, and what they most care for is concrete practical application. So I have gradually weeded out the former and left the latter unreduced; and now, that I have at last written out the lectures, they contain a minimum of what is deemed 'scientific' in psychology, and are practical and popular in the extreme. Some of my colleagues may possibly shake their heads at this; but in taking my cue from what has seemed to me to be the feeling of the audiences, I believe that I am shaping my book so as to satisfy the more genuine public need." Indeed this full conscientiousness, this thoroughgoing devotion to clearness on the writer's part, must lie back of all successful communication.

2. **Sincerity.** — Another quality which is sure to aid a writer in "getting his man" is sincerity. Mr. Kipling has said that "every effort of art is an effort to be sincere"; and it certainly is true that all of us expect a writer to be fair and frank in the expression of his thought. Thackeray knew this, and in the preface of *Pendennis* met the reader's natural attitude squarely:

[1] Henry Holt and Company.

"As we judge of a man's character, after long frequenting his society, not by one speech, or by one mood or opinion, or by one day's talk, but by the tenor of his general bearing and conversation, so of a writer, who delivers himself up to you perforce unreservedly, you say, Is he honest? Does he tell the truth in the main? Does he seem actuated by a desire to find out and speak it? · Is he a quack, who shams sentiment, or mouths for effect? Does he seek popularity by claptraps or other arts? . . . I have no right to say to these [readers], You shall not find fault with my art, or fall asleep over my pages; but I ask you to believe that this person writing strives to tell the truth. If there is not that, there is nothing."

The first element of sincerity, then, is honesty. But for a writer to believe what he writes is only the commonest kind of fairness. Fairness in the fullest sense demands more than truth-telling of the obvious sort. It is just as much a part of honesty for a writer to hold an open, unprejudiced mind, not twisting his data to make out a case or forcibly interfering with his characters as they live out the story in their own way, as it is for him to avoid an outright lie. Without this full truthfulness he cannot satisfy his reader. Neither agile thinking nor skilled technique can possibly make writing ring true or atone for its inevitable hollowness if it is not honest. But sincerity also includes frankness. It requires a writer to say what he believes as well as believe what he says. This is sometimes dangerous, to be sure, but it usually commands attention and it often wins a reader permanently. Burke involved himself in some temporary unpopularity by his spirited plea for conciliation with the American Colonies, but undoubtedly his bold frankness had much to do with giving his famous speech its lasting power. Similarly, frankness contributes to the rugged strength of Emerson's essays, and makes the graceful self-revelations of Lamb and Stevenson altogether charming. In truth, every manifestation of sincerity in a writer inspires confidence in the reader and helps materially to enlist his interested attention.

3. **Earnestness.** — The third essential is earnestness, a quality closely related to sincerity. It might almost be considered sincerity of a heightened sort, for, as Arnold said in his essay on *The Study of Poetry*, high seriousness comes always from absolute sincerity. The sincere writer believes what he says and says what he believes; the earnest writer believes also that he has something to say. With this conviction impelling him, he will express himself eagerly and spiritedly; he will let himself go freely and not be afraid. And of course this interest on his part is contagious. If he is filled with enthusiasm over a mountain view or a poem, his reader, too, will become filled with it; if he is warmly sympathetic with a character whom he has created or deeply concerned over a struggle which he depicts, his reader is sure to catch something of this interest; if he is intensely earnest in explaining some principle or advocating some plan, his very earnestness compels his reader to give serious attention, and often sways him toward belief. In any kind of writing, indifference is the unpardonable sin. Even he who writes under the necessity of meeting an assignment can use material which for him has vital interest. If a writer does not have some zest for writing, if he is without all sense of a message, what he has to say will be weak and flat, and the reader will give his attention to some other writer who is more in earnest. Everyone knows that the best companion is not the man who has to tell a story, but the man who has a story to tell. And it is quite the same with all kinds of writing. "No man can write anything who does not think that what he writes is for the time the history of the world."

4. **Reserve power and self-control.** — It is possible, however, for a writer to let his zeal steal away his self-control. He should write with eagerness, with spirit, even with abandon; and yet all the time he must keep his balance and give the impression of writing with unlimited resources. Extravagance and rant are never convincing. We pay little heed to the girl who "just adores" this and finds that "perfectly exquisite": her enthusiasm is less significant than her shallowness. Likewise the

merchant who offers something which is the "best ever" at a price "far below the cost of production" has little chance of interesting even the most unsophisticated. On the other hand, understatement, discrimination, and restraint always make a favorable impression. Perhaps we can find a suggestive parallel in boxing, where a man gains over his opponent not only by eagerness and hard hitting, but still more by skillfully placing his blows and somehow giving the impression that he has unlimited strength and endurance. When a writer strains to put down all he thinks or feels, when he piles his words as high as he can, when he stresses mere detail along with what is truly important, when he labors openly for effects in style, he will inevitably lose his reader's confidence. It is rather the nice sense of proportion which comes with full knowledge and clear thinking, the ease and smoothness which come with faithful practice, the combined certainty and delicacy of touch which is possible only with a mastery of literary art, that inspire belief in a writer's strength and skill.

B. Methods of Presentation

Attitude, however, will not count for much if it does not go beyond good intentions vigorously maintained. Conscientiousness, sincerity, earnestness, and self-control are valuable primarily because they guide one to effective methods of presentation. A writer's desire to understand his reader's point of view, his unfaltering belief in the importance of what he has to say, and his cool, level head become really dynamic only in skillful methods of arranging material and embodying thoughts in language.

1. **Arranging the material.** — Manifestly any effective arrangement requires a skillful beginning. As we shall see in the following chapters, there is no set formula for beginning well. Each piece of composition must be treated as a separate problem. Yet in the nature of the case, a writer will be seriously handicapped if he does not begin in a way that will attract his

reader's attention and make him want to go further. Poe put the matter forcefully: "It is far better that we commence irregularly — immethodically — than that we fail to arrest attention; but the two points, method and pungency, may always be combined. At all risks, let there be a few vivid sentences *imprimis*, by way of the electric bell to the telegraph." [1] Now the writer who is sincere and eager about his work will naturally choose a direct and vital way to begin. He will be too much in earnest to tolerate needless delay in starting, and his own interest will prevent dreary commonplaces and give color to the opening paragraphs. Furthermore, if he has taken pains to understand his reader's point of view, he will know how to begin most clearly. Whether he uses a formal introduction to announce his method of procedure, or opens with some personal comments which will put him on terms of easy intimacy with his readers, or goes directly into his subject in the first line, he will find his method of presentation a natural outgrowth of his attitude toward his material and his reader.

The effectiveness of any writing will depend, too, upon the way in which the writer proceeds after he has begun. It can by no means be taken for granted that once a reader is started he will continue to give attention. Any reader expects to keep moving ahead as he turns the pages, whether they present events or ideas. But of course, mere progression is not enough. He must go forward in the most direct and orderly way possible. Here again, the demands of effectiveness will be met easily by one who takes the right attitude toward his work. There is little doubt about energy and directness when a man writes with deep feeling. And anyone who is conscientious enough to study his reader can find a way of arranging his material which will be both clear and interesting. If, in the nature of the case, time or space relations are important, he will accept the simple order they suggest. On the other hand, if some other method of treatment is needed to bring out logical relations or to give variety, he will follow it without yielding to an order

[1] *Marginalia.*

which is ready-made. Moreover, whatever the plan of procedure, he will be most careful to reveal the general structure of his piece and to make unmistakable transitions.

One other essential is a skillful ending. Naturally a writer will want to arrange his material so that what he counts most significant will stand prominently in the reader's mind when he is ready to turn aside to other matters. It is not probable that one who is really in earnest would ever allow his work to "run downhill." He would urge his thought in on the reader either by restating the important points or by building them up to an intellectual or emotional climax. But the well-managed conclusion is more than a forceful summary or climax; it really concludes the subject presented. The writer who has mastered his material and has come to understand his reader's attitude, undoubtedly has seen the end from the beginning and proceeded accordingly. Instead of stopping abruptly, thereby giving his reader an unpleasant jolt, he stops at the point which the reader can recognize for himself as the true culmination of the whole matter. When once a reader sees "a good stopping place," it only blurs his impression or dissipates the force of the thought to compel him to go on. This vexatious problem of finding a skillful ending has been happily presented by Dr. Van Dyke in his essay on *The Art of Leaving Off:*[1] "There is a psychological moment at which the song has made its most thrilling impression, and there the music should cease. There is an instant of persuasion at which the argument has had its force, and there it should break off, just when the nail is driven home, and before the hammer begins to bruise the wood. The art lies in discovering this moment of cessation and using it to the best advantage."

2. **Phrasing the material.** — No matter with what skill a writer arranges his material in these large ways, however, he cannot present it effectively without giving close attention to the phrasing. In the first place, words must be chosen which will carry the thought accurately, and sentences must be framed

[1] *Days Off.* Charles Scribner's Sons.

which will bring out the thought relations distinctly. But this is not easily done. Few English words have a single, exact meaning, and most of them must suggest slightly different things to different people because no two persons' background of experience can ever be identical. This difficulty in the precise use of single words is much increased, too, because of limitations imposed by English syntax. It is often next to impossible to make reference words point unmistakably, and the essentially inflexible English word order is by no means always adequate to relate one part of the thought to another within the same sentence. Yet in spite of all obstacles and pitfalls a writer who will labor persistently can approximate success in making his writing mean to his reader exactly what it means to him, — only that, and inevitably that. It is just this grim insistence on accuracy which the conscientious, earnest writer manifests. He is so much concerned with getting his subject before his reader that he will have clearness, whatever the cost. As a matter of course, he will search after the one word which denotes his thought exactly. He will phrase his thought in the concrete as much as possible, too, since concrete words can vary less in meaning than more general ones; and he will find words which are familiar to his reader, so that there will be a minimum of friction in the communication. Likewise in the management of his sentences, he will tolerate neither such loose construction as would result in vagueness nor such intricacy as would render understanding difficult. He will do all that can be done to make thought relations clear through the discriminating use of conjunctions, skillful punctuation, or the adoption of parallel constructions. In fact, he will spare no pains to phrase his material so that it will reach his reader with the utmost accuracy and the least possible resistance. Probably no one has been more relentless in this warring on obscurity than Macaulay. It was he who elicited the unique praise of never having written an obscure sentence in his life; and it was his invariable practice, according to Trevelyan, never to let a sentence pass muster until it was as good as he could make it.

Evidently he knew well the truth of the famous dictum: "Easy writing makes hard reading."

Then, too, a writer must make his phrases take hold. Emerson said: "It makes a great difference to the force of any sentence whether there be a man behind it or no. In the learned journal, in the influential newspaper, I discern no form; only some irresponsible shadow; oftener some moneyed corporation, or some dangler who hopes, in the mask and robes of his paragraph, to pass for somebody. But through every clause and part of speech of a right book I meet the eyes of the most determined of men; his force and terror inundate every word; the commas and dashes are alive; so that the writing is athletic and nimble, — can go far and live long." Indeed, beyond the mastery of the mechanics of language, which comes only with practice, the real secret of vigorous writing lies chiefly in the writer's attitude. If he feels strongly, he will inevitably strip off all unnecessary verbiage and dispense with mere ornament. If he is thoroughly aroused to the importance of what he has to say, he will hunt out telling words, words which flash an image across the mind, — real "cartridges of significance," — to drive his meaning home with the utmost force. So, too, with sentences. He will employ every device of form and position, — inversion, antithesis, suspense, climax, iteration, rhetorical questions, and the like, — in order to gain power in the presentation of his thought. He will make frequent use of the short, incisive sentence. He may even clip the normal sentence construction, where the context makes the meaning unmistakable, in order to gain the advantage of compression or to concentrate attention on a few important words. Moreover, in both his use of words and in his handling of sentences he will scorn the flat and the commonplace. He will reach out boldly to make his language express himself as well as his message; and like Thoreau or Kipling he will find in this personal coloring not only the means of gaining the reader's interest, but also the foundation of a style. Yet in all these efforts to make his language effective he will remain complete master of himself.

He will never confuse variety with novelty, nor strength with violence.

III. THE WRITER AND GOOD FORM

A third test of effectiveness in composition remains. We have already noted that a writer must master his material and enlist his reader's interest, and it may seem that these two tests ought to be sufficient. Now it must be admitted that in much "practical" writing, where the sole aim is to get the facts to the reader in a way that will enable him to understand and remember them, a certain bare, hard effectiveness does come with the mere conveying of the material. And it seems to be peculiarly American to put practical considerations so far ahead of the æsthetic that the claims of beauty are forgotten. But after all, even from a utilitarian point of view, it is important for the writer to present his material in a way that will satisfy good taste. Just as an athlete runs farther or jumps higher if his "form" is good, so the writer finds a distinct practical advantage in skillful execution. As Quintilian reflects, "How can anything be firmer when it is in disorder than when it is bound fast together and well arranged? — As the flow of rivers is stronger in a sloping bed, which interposes no obstacle, than when the waters are broken by, and struggle with, obstacles of rock, so is style which is connected, and flows with full force, better than that which is broken and interrupted. Why then should men think that vigor is impaired by beauty, when nothing is ever at its full power without art, and beauty is art's constant companion?"[1] Thus the editor or the essayist, though he have the natural force of a Carlyle, may expect greater success in delivering his message when he increases the smoothness and elegance of his expression. And then, as soon as some less narrowly utilitarian point of view is taken, it is perfectly clear that no writing can be effective in the highest sense unless it has the beauty which is characteristic of all the best art. The overelegant and the inelegant alike can be acceptable only

[1] Quoted by Professor George Saintsbury, *Loci Critici*, p. 64.

to readers who lack taste or who will waive considerations of taste; and it cannot possibly endure the tests of time. Certain it is that all the great masters of our prose, even those who were essentially practical in their purpose, like Bacon and Bunyan in the past or Huxley and Lincoln in the literary generation just preceding our own, were consummate masters of good form. They were themselves gentlemen, with the gentleman's feeling for the best. They were possessed of a fine skill in shaping their pieces and a sure instinct for perfecting their diction. Indeed, the complete effectiveness of these writers appears in this, that in addition to being ready to write and able to win their reader's attention, they gave their writing a form really appropriate and beautiful.

A. The Æsthetic Fitness of the Writer

1. Sense of beauty. — If composition is to be more effective because of the way in which the material is presented, it is necessary that the writer shall himself be æsthetically fit. To begin with, he must have a sense of beauty. His taste must save him from admitting anything coarse, or ugly, or incongruous — unless, of course, there is good reason for its introduction, and even then he must bring it in without offense to the reader. His taste must also save him from faults in form and expression. He must not deform or deface his product by neglecting proportion and symmetry or by violating harmony of tone and purity of diction. Nor is this enough. Inspired by the contemplation of the best specimens of the writer's art, he will take a positive pleasure in the beautiful and a worthy pride in making his own writing as perfect as possible. Just as habitual insistence on accurate self-expression is necessarily involved in clearness and interest, this personal delight in good workmanship must lie back of charm and elegance. The scrupulous carpenter will not permit rough edges or open joints; the painter with ideals of technique will not allow careless strokes; nor will the good literary craftsman tolerate stiff sentences or

abrupt transitions, harsh words or broken cadences. He is not satisfied simply with getting his idea expressed, nor with getting it expressed in a way that will make an agreeable impression; his soul craves beauty and his utterance must be perfect. Stevenson, himself uncompromising in workmanship, explains this ideal in writing to a young friend on the temptations which come to the artist as he works "entirely on his honor": "The public knows little or nothing of those merits in the quest of which you are condemned to spend the bulk of your endeavors. Merits of design, the merit of first-hand energy, the merit of a certain cheap accomplishment, which a man of the artistic temper easily acquires — these they can recognize, and these they value. But to those more exquisite refinements of proficiency and finish, which the artist so ardently desires and so keenly feels, for which (in the vigorous words of Balzac) he must toil 'like a miner buried in a landslip,' for which, day after day, he recasts and revises and rejects — the gross mass of the public must be ever blind. To those lost pains, suppose you attain the highest pitch of merit, posterity may possibly do justice; so, as is so probable, you fail by even a hair's breadth of the highest, rest certain they shall never be observed. Under the shadow of this cold thought, alone in his studio, the artist must preserve from day to day his constancy to the ideal."[1]

2. **Poise of literary good breeding.** — Along with this sense of beauty the effective writer possesses the poise which marks literary good breeding. There are people about us in life who seem always to do the right thing and say the right thing, who are everywhere at ease, who keep their composure through the most trying circumstances, who have a sure instinct for the best. These people of poise and fine sensibility we admiringly call well bred. Now literary good breeding is quite a parallel thing; it, too, shows itself in fine feeling and poise. When Dr. Johnson praised Addison's style as "familiar but not coarse, and elegant but not ostentatious," he recognized that Addison

[1] Letter to a young gentleman who proposes to embrace the career of art, in *Across the Plains*.

the writer was well poised. The same literary good breeding shows in Thackeray, and perhaps in Hawthorne. Certainly the Gettysburg Address, the Springfield Farewell Speech, and the Letter to Mrs. Bixby show that Lincoln, in spite of his crude environment and early hardships, had the instincts of a cultivated gentleman. In these writers, as in all writers with the finer æsthetic sensitiveness, there is an instinctive craving for elegance, grace, and beauty, an instinctive "abhorrence toward all manner of display." [1] Thus we find all such evidences of false taste as bombast, bookishness, and preciosity absent from their writing. Their style shows no excesses; there are no forced effects, no mannerisms, no phrases which are conspicuous rather than expressive. They strike a happy balance between delicacy and strength, between bare plainness and lavish ornamentation, between the slavishly conventional use of words and a bold freedom in bending language to suit individual purpose. In short, there can come from the writer of real literary good breeding nothing which is not done with elegance and beauty.

3. **Respect for audience.** — One other point is involved in the writer's fitness to realize this higher, fuller effectiveness, and that is his respect for his reader. Many times people write in bad taste who know better and who consciously compromise their own standards of elegance because they think they can reach their readers better by so doing. Probably this fault is most noticeable among newspaper writers, novelists, and others who try to reach large classes of people. They spread their material out thin, sometimes with little regard for its strict truth; they bring in boisterous humor or sickly pathos, and substitute sentimentality for genuine sentiment, just for the emotional thrills; they pile up high-sounding phrases with little real meaning and use the most fantastic words they can discover. Now the fundamental error with all of them is that they take their readers at their worst instead of their best. In reaching down they fail to take account of their readers'

[1] See Charles Sears Baldwin, *A College Manual of Rhetoric*, p. 207.

ability to reach up. The scientific writing of men like Huxley and William James is without the cheapness of most popularized science, because these men believed that their readers would think seriously if the truths of science were put within the range of their comprehension and related to their ordinary interests. Similarly, the Gettysburg Address had the full effectiveness of a masterpiece, although delivered before a large popular audience, because Lincoln believed that the men before him would respond to sincere feeling expressed simply.

B. Satisfying the Demands of Good Form

1. **Arrangement of material for symmetry.** — It is difficult to suggest any very definite means by which a writer can satisfy the demands of good form, because of the subtlety of the matters involved and the large part which the writer's own æsthetic feeling must play. For instance, it can be said that a writer ought to arrange his material for symmetry; but there is little more to say. The writer's own sense of form must show him how to round out his work so that the parts are in a way equal and similar. It is easy to get simple examples of this symmetry in nature, where the trees and flowers and animals all owe much of their beauty to it. It is also easy to see the symmetry of the sculptor's work, because his statue represents form quite literally. But in writing, it is far more difficult to find good examples. Much writing is not highly perfected in respect to form; and it is never easy to feel the symmetry of long pieces. Perhaps a short poem like Wordsworth's *She Was a Phantom of Delight* or Lincoln's well-nigh perfect Gettysburg Address will illustrate literary symmetry satisfactorily. The gain in effectiveness which is secured by balancing the parts of a composition is, of course, primarily the sheer pleasure given by all well-rounded, evenly proportioned work; but it should be noted that incidentally the effect of completeness which always attends symmetry adds clearness as well as charm.

2. **Perfecting of sentences.** — Another way in which a writer

can meet the demands of good form is by the perfecting of his sentences. This will probably be done for the most part in revision, although the writer's natural elegance and sense of beauty will influence every sentence he frames. To have a sentence perfect, he ought, in the first place, to suit the form of the sentence to its substance; and in more than a superficial way. In this example from an editorial the manner in which the sentence suddenly collapses just fits the writer's purpose to ridicule:

"Every patriot heart from the Atlantic to the Golden Gate and from the Gulf of Mexico to the forty-ninth parallel of north latitude so recently eulogized by Mr. C——, will thrill with pride at the news that our epic scramble for the privilege of lending China some money has succeeded."[1]

And in this famous apostrophe by Raleigh the slow suspense and measured rise to a climax give the dignity and impressiveness which are suited to the exalted thought:

"O eloquent, just, and mighty Death! Whom none could advise, thou hast persuaded; what none hath dared, thou hast done; and whom all the world hath flattered, thou only hast cast out of the world and despised: thou hast drawn together all the far stretched greatness, all the pride, cruelty, and ambition of man, and covered it all over with these two narrow words, HIC JACET."[2]

Furthermore, in perfecting his sentences a writer must harmonize emphasis and ease. In such a sentence as this one, for instance, there is an unfortunate effect of artificiality: "When Senator La Follette was 'hazed' by his fellows, he appealed from the Senate chamber empty to the Chautauqua benches full." And in Carlyle we often come upon sentences where the normal word order is so distorted, presumably for purposes of special emphasis, that we find it hard to read them, sometimes even to understand them. But smoothness and force, grace and energy, are not incompatible. As Professor Baldwin has said, "Elegance, corrected by emotional directness, shall keep

[1] The *Nation*, Vol. 90, p. 548.
[2] Sir Walter Raleigh, *History of the World*.

simplicity; emotional directness, corrected by elegance, shall keep composure." [1]

A third consideration in making sentences measure up to the highest standards of good form is their movement. The perfect sentence has a natural flow, due to the length and order of its phrases and clauses. Indeed, rhythm has more to do with the effective prose sentence than either the ordinary writer or the ordinary reader supposes. Of course, in some of Webster's bursts of eloquence or Ruskin's "purple patches" the unusual rhythmic effects are evident; and we know that much of Lincoln's prose, always simple and inconspicuous, is strikingly close to blank verse. But one has only to read an unrhythmical sentence in order to realize that he naturally expects a certain rise and fall, a gradual culmination, a pause, an unbroken cadence. When any of these is absent, the sentence "does not sound right"; when they are present, we are pleased, even though we pass on without asking why. These familiar lines from Stevenson's *El Dorado* owe their special effectiveness to their varied and easy flow:

> A strange picture we make on our way to our chimeras, ceaselessly marching, grudging ourselves the time for rest; indefatigable, adventurous pioneers. It is true that we shall never reach the goal; it is even more than probable that there is no such place; and if we lived for centuries and were endowed with the powers of a god, we should find ourselves not much nearer what we wanted at the end. O toiling hands of mortals! O unwearied feet, traveling ye know not whither! Soon, soon, it seems to you, you must come forth on some conspicuous hilltop, and but a little way further, against the setting sun, descry the spires of El Dorado. Little do ye know your own blessedness; for to travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive, and the true success is to labor.[2]

3. Choice of words. — Finally, satisfying the demands of good form depends upon the writer's flawless use of words. With a single word it is often possible for him to make or mar his whole impression of beauty. As was said more fully in a

[1] Charles Sears Baldwin, *College Manual of Rhetoric*, p. 215.

[2] Quoted by John Franklin Genung in his *Working Principles of Rhetoric*, p. 216.

preceding chapter, a writer must seek words which are individually appropriate, each to its detail of thought. But if the expression of the thought as a whole is to be at all perfect, the words must also suit the tone of the whole composition. "Scramble," for instance, by all means the best-chosen word in the sentence quoted from the *Nation*, cannot be imagined in Raleigh's apostrophe to death. Thus every word has its definite meaning and its power to suggest more than it actually denotes. It is for the writer to choose his words so that there will be an exquisite harmony of language and thought. Then, too, the words must fit together well. Even though entirely appropriate otherwise, they must not be harsh or awkward when brought into combination. Through euphony the writer with a subtle ear for the melody of words can get effects of rare beauty. After all, however, the ultimate quality to be sought is simplicity. Distorting words for special effects, straining for novelty, searching for the bizarre, making a show of learning, — in fact, anything eccentric or unnatural mars the perfection of one's writing. As has been said already, the sincere writer is too frank to be other than natural, too earnest to tolerate needless ornamentation.

Both the perfected sentences and the skillfully chosen words contribute to the unusual effectiveness of the following passage from Sydney Smith:

> Take some quiet, sober moment of life, and add together the two ideas of pride and man; behold him, creature of a span high, stalking through infinite space in all the grandeur of littleness. Perched on a speck of the universe, every wind of heaven strikes into his blood the coldness of death; his soul floats from his body like melody from the string; day and night, as dust on the wheel, he is rolled along the heavens, through a labyrinth of worlds, and all the creations of God are flaming above and beneath. Is this a creature to make for himself a crown of glory, to deny his own flesh, to mock at his fellow, sprung from that dust to which both will soon return? Does the proud man not err? Does he not suffer? Does he not die? When he reasons is he never stopped by difficulties? When he acts is he never tempted by pleasure? When he lives is he free from pain? When he dies can he escape the common grave? Pride is not the heritage of man; humility should dwell with frailty, and atone for ignorance, error, and imperfection.

READINGS AND EXERCISES

1. What means of clarifying your mind on a subject do you find most helpful? Are you influenced by writing down notes, walking in the open air, riding on a train, or "talking it out" with some one?

2. Dr. Crothers has said: "The writer who is unusually fluent should take warning from the instructions which accompany his fountain pen: 'When this pen flows too freely it is a sign that it is nearly empty and should be filled.'"

3. Which of the following examples seems to you more convincing? How do you account for the difference?

a. In the extreme south of this great Union of sovereign States, between the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean, lies Florida, the fairest flower in the garden of Statehood. Her balmy climate, her healthful ocean breezes, her delicious tropical fruits, her wonderful palm trees, her tall pines, her majestic oaks, her silvery lakes, her wonderful rivers, and her youth-preserving springs have made Florida famous throughout the civilized world. Nowhere in all the habitable globe does the sun shine with such resplendent glory as in Florida; no painter's brush can transfer to canvas the ravishing beauty of a moonlight night in Florida; no pen can picture, nor can any imagination conceive, the transcendent beauty of her landscape, the fertility of her soil, the luxuriance of her tropical fruits and flowers, the rich perfume of which is borne in riotous profusion on every passing breeze.[1]

b. No one, not in my situation, can appreciate my feeling of sadness at this parting. To this place, and the kindness of these people, I owe everything. Here I have lived a quarter of a century, and have passed from a young to an old man. Here my children have been born, and one is buried. I now leave, not knowing when or whether ever I may return, with a task before me greater than that which rested upon Washington. Without the assistance of that Divine Being who ever attended him, I cannot succeed. With that assistance, I cannot fail. Trusting in Him who can go with me, and remain with you, and be everywhere for good, let us confidently hope that all will yet be well. To His care commending you, as I hope in your prayers you will commend me, I bid you an affectionate farewell.[2]

4. Read pages 307–310 in George Herbert Palmer's *The Life of Alice Freeman Palmer*. The story told by Mrs. Palmer gives an

[1] From a speech in Congress.

[2] Lincoln's Address of Farewell, Springfield, Illinois, February 11, 1861.

excellent illustration of effective adaptation. The same thorough understanding of those addressed appears in Huxley's lectures to workingmen on scientific subjects.

5. As an example of writing which combines respect for the reader with sympathetic understanding, read the letter which Emerson wrote to a little girl of thirteen. Dean Briggs quotes it in *Routine and Ideals*, p. 72.

6. Do you think the demand for good form is increasing in this country? Is there anything significant in the "arts and crafts" movement, the spread of artistic house decorating, and the discussions of "a city beautiful"?

PART TWO

CHAPTER VII — EXPOSITION

THROUGHOUT the general discussion of our subject it has been evident that certain important differences exist within the field of composition. The material varies; the writer's purpose varies; the reader's attitude varies. And these differences result in rather distinct kinds of writing. If, then, we are to pursue our study further, we must simplify our task by taking up one kind at a time. To this end some classification is necessary.

To find a satisfactory classification, however, is by no means an easy matter. For example, the usual division of all writing into exposition, argumentation, description, and narration, though convenient in many ways, is at once artificial and indefinite. However distinct these categories may be on the pages of a textbook, and however well they may accommodate a set of chosen examples, they are of doubtful service when one tries to classify the contents of some current book or magazine. The truth is that these forms rarely appear in a pure state; even a short magazine article may combine two or three of them, or possibly all four. And yet a classification based upon literary forms, — novels, dramas, tales, essays, and the like, — is even less serviceable. To be sure, this follows the usage of the practical literary world; but some of these forms do not seriously concern the ordinary student of composition, and none of them can be said to include very much of the writing that he would use in meeting the demands of everyday life. Nor is a division of all writing into instrumental and æsthetic much more helpful. It has the merit of simplicity, and unquestionably rests upon sound analysis; but each of these two classes is so inclusive that a bewildering diversity of problems would confront us if we carried the division no further.

Perhaps the most satisfactory plan is to accept the old classification based on the writer's predominant purpose to explain, argue, describe, or narrate, modified by the fundamental distinction between writing that is instrumental and that which is æsthetic. Accordingly we shall take up exposition, argumentation, description, and narration in order; but in discussing each one we shall consider separately the writing which is a means to an end and that which is an end in itself. In this chapter, for example, after treating certain preliminary matters which concern all exposition, we shall study effectiveness in formal, serious exposition apart from effectiveness in the exposition which gives imaginative pleasure as well as intellectual stimulus. It must always be borne in mind, of course, that the distinctness of our division and subdivision cannot be insisted upon too rigidly.

I. THE FIELD OF EXPOSITION

A. The Nature of Exposition

Of these forms of composition, exposition is the one which is concerned with explanation. It is essentially intellectual in its nature, and deals with the general rather than the particular. Whenever the writer's primary purpose is to set forth the meaning of some idea or principle, to define a conception, to show the significance of a movement, to interpret a character, to criticize a work of art, to explain some process or plan, to make clear causes and relations, to comment reflectively on what he observes about him in life, his writing is expository. He may tell how to play quarterback in football, or how to test seed corn; he may show why freshmen are laughed at, or why the government of cities in the United States has been inefficient; he may analyze Lincoln's prose style, or the newsboy as a type of character; he may comment on the lure of the city, or the rise of the country physician; he may explain the moral influence of the moving picture show, or his idea of sport for sport's sake; — in every case he will write exposition. Any act of

setting forth, of making clear, of explaining, is essentially expository.

Evidently, then, when its true nature is understood, exposition is no strange or unimportant form of composition. On the contrary, it has a very large place in everyday life. The student has need to explain all sorts of matters connected with the athletic, social, or intellectual life of his college; the business man must explain what he has to sell and what he wants to buy; the landscape gardener must explain his plan for beautifying a city; the chemist must explain how a dye or a fertilizer can be manufactured; the man in public life must explain his attitude on political or moral issues and his proposed solution of various social and economic problems. Explanation is likewise necessary to all education and the spread of knowledge in society. Indeed very little of the work of the world could be done without it. And in the world's literature, that is, in the body of its permanent writing, the place of exposition is correspondingly large. Treatises, essays, — practically all the literature of knowledge and opinion, — are expository. Hence it is highly important that everyone possess skill in this kind of writing. The student of composition who thinks that he dislikes exposition, or who slights it, either fails to realize how close it is to his life, or else has no knowledge, no ideas, to express.

B. The Relation of Exposition to Other Forms of Composition

But, as was intimated earlier in this chapter, exposition cannot be isolated in any strict way from the other forms of composition. For instance, exposition and argumentation are very closely related. They are much alike in nature, in that both deal largely with the general, and in that both appeal primarily to the reader's intellect rather than to his imagination. Furthermore, these two kinds of writing tend to combine. An argument necessarily includes explanation; indeed we may say that exposition is the foundation of all argumentation. Conversely

it is very easy in explaining ideas or principles or plans to urge their truth or their importance. Suppose we are explaining a model dairy or college hazing; it will be hard to keep away from advantages and disadvantages, to avoid saying what ought to be and what ought not to be. Of course we may simply state our opinions, but we shall naturally want to make them as convincing as possible, and thus we easily approach informal argument. The essential distinction between exposition and argumentation, however, is that exposition always gives an impartial explanation, while argumentation always takes sides and attempts proof of a proposition, either stated or implied. If a writer's intention is simply to explain what scientific business management is, with perhaps an unbiased account of the chief advantages and shortcomings of the plan as it has been applied, he is wholly within the field of exposition. On the other hand, if he seeks to convince his reader that scientific business management ought to be applied to American railroads, or if he attacks the idea of scientific business management as destructive of individuality, he is plainly in the field of argumentation. If his purpose is less distinct and single, his product will fall somewhere near the imaginary line between the two.

Similarly exposition and description may overlap. To be sure, an explanation of some legal principle or theological doctrine is far removed from a description of a snow scene in the city or of moonlight on a college campus. An explanation of frost as a phenomenon in the world of nature is easily distinguished from a word picture of the view from a bedroom window on a frosty December morning. Exposition, as has been said, explains the general, and description presents particular images; exposition is primarily intellectual, and description is primarily imaginative. And yet very often it helps a general explanation to introduce a description of some particular scene or object, because the concrete and the specific are always more easily understood than the abstract and the general, and to the average reader are also much more interesting. If we are discussing open-air schools, we very naturally and properly

describe some particular open-air schoolroom — perhaps show a class in session there — as a means of making our writing more effective. Or, if we are explaining what the model dairy is and how it is conducted, we may tell how a particular well-conducted dairy looks and smells as a means of serving our general expository purpose. It is possible to go even further: we can offer a description of one model dairy as representing what all dairies ought to be. Our method is particular and descriptive, to be sure, but our purpose remains general and explanatory. This is especially common in scientific writing, where the description of any one bird, or fish, or flower, may be really equivalent to an exposition of the general class of birds, or fishes, or flowers, to which the particular one chosen belongs. An explanation of the common house sparrow, for instance, except for some information about food and nesting, can be little different from a description of a single sparrow. And so it is with the ordinary brook trout or the American field daisy. As a matter of fact, whenever the explanation of some general class of objects or institutions is practically coincident with the description of any particular object or institution which is typical of its class, exposition and description come together, really merge, and the writing may be regarded as one kind or the other at will.

In very much the same way exposition and narration may be combined. If the expository piece seeks to explain some abstract conception, like loyalty or "common honesty," it increases the effectiveness of the explanation greatly if a few incidents are cited to show these qualities. Or if the writer seeks to comment on American ideas of recreation, he may well supplement his general discussion by telling what certain people, presumably typical of their locality or social class, do to amuse themselves. In a similar way, we often find an expository element in narratives, especially narratives of fact like biography and history. It is only where the matter to be explained approaches the particular or where some time element is involved in it, however, that there is any chance of confusing

exposition and narration. When one undertakes to explain how a tariff bill is enacted into law in the United States, or how some famous catcher played his position, or how the New Harmony movement in Indiana was instituted, his problem is indeed somewhat similar to the narrator's. Yet the difference lies just here: exposition tries to make some general process, or method, or movement clear to the reader's understanding; narration tries to make a series of particular events real to the reader's imagination.

C. Two Kinds of Exposition

Our subdivision of exposition involves little that is new. Instrumental exposition meets some definite demand of practical life, whereas æsthetic exposition, like all fine art, gives pleasure. Instrumental exposition, on the one hand, is essentially formal; it is systematically planned, predominantly intellectual, and relatively impersonal. Æsthetic exposition, on the other hand, is somewhat informal; it often has a careless, go-as-you-please way, it is largely imaginative or emotional in its appeal, and it is usually personal, even familiar, in style. In exposition that is instrumental the abstract or general is explained largely by explicit statement, with only an incidental use of the concrete for the sake of illustration; but in exposition that is æsthetic the concrete and the specific are used freely to suggest individual opinion or impression. Among well-known expository writers of the past century, Macaulay and Arnold and Newman are plainly instrumental in most of their work; they had certain information and ideas to give their fellow countrymen and they wrote in the name of truth. On the contrary, such writers as Addison and Lamb and Stevenson produced essays which are plainly æsthetic; they had delightful whims and dreams, happy combinations of sense and nonsense, and these they set down in the name of pleasure and beauty. Of course all writing is not so easily assigned to its class as the work of these men. There is inevitably some over-

lapping; much exposition shows characteristics of both kinds; and, as we shall see in a later paragraph, instrumental exposition often increases in effectiveness if it approaches the æsthetic in some points of method and style. After all, it is very much as it is with the walks we take: some of them are strictly business expeditions, wherein we hurry straight to our goal with no thought for the beauty of the world about us and above us; some of them are frankly pleasure strolls, wherein we give ourselves entirely to the enjoyment of birds and flowers, clouds and stars, with never a thought of getting anywhere in particular; and some of them, many of them indeed, are walks wherein we combine business and pleasure as well as we can without detriment to our main purpose.

II. EXPOSITORY METHODS

Before we take up the specific problems of effectiveness in the two kinds of exposition, we must understand some expository methods common to both. Much of the time, to be sure, we accept the explanations made to us in speech and writing without questioning the method; but if we notice carefully, it will appear that there are five principal ways of explaining: analysis, definition, exemplification, comparison, and contrast. These methods may be used separately, but more often they are used in combination. We may observe further that while all five of them are used in instrumental exposition, the last three are used more freely in æsthetic exposition.

A. Analysis

One method of exposition, then, is analysis or division. To lay a subject off into parts, to find the joints in it, to resolve it into its factors, makes it more easily understood. The parts can then be taken up, examined separately, and considered in relation to each other. Suppose that we have a process to explain, a political situation to account for, a type of character to present. The analytic method accomplishes the explanation

by picking out the separate steps of the process, the separate causes of the political situation, the separate traits of the character type. Thus one writer whose purpose it is to explain the handling of garden land divides the process into several steps: draining, trenching and subsoiling, preparation of the surface, saving the moisture, weeding and subsequent tillage, and enriching.[1] Another writer who seeks to explain the opportunities of journalism as a profession divides his material into four parts: the opportunities due to the number of publications issued, those due to specialization, those due to the power of the press, and those due to the value of press experience. Or, again, a critic who attempts to weigh an author's claim to literary permanence divides his study into three parts: style, romance, and morality.[2] Indeed since the object of all exposition is to simplify and make clear, there is often no better way of explaining a matter which is complicated than to resolve it into its natural or logical parts.

This method is without value, however, unless the analysis is sound. In the first place, the division into parts must be complete; if not in an absolute or exhaustive sense, at least complete for all practical purposes. An analysis of athletic eligibility, for example, which did not include physical fitness, would be seriously incomplete. Then again, there must be no cross division, that is, no change in point of view during the analysis. To divide college students into loafers, sports, athletes, and vegetarians is worse than incomplete; it is inconsistent, and if less ridiculous it would be confusing, because the basis of classification is changed in the process of analysis. Moreover, the parts into which anything is divided must be mutually exclusive. In the example just cited, the analysis is worthless, not only because the classes enumerated do not include all college students and because the point of view is shifted, but also because the classes overlap. Indeed cross division and the overlapping of parts almost inevitably go

[1] L. H. Bailey, *Manual of Gardening*, Chap. IV.
[2] Walter Raleigh, *Robert Louis Stevenson*.

together. Finally, it is essential that the parts be of similar rank. Thus an analysis of athletic eligibility under five conditions, — university enrollment, physical fitness, scholarship, amateur record, and time of participation, — is imperfect because it does not recognize the parts which are logically coördinate and those which are logically subordinate; and explanation based upon such an analysis would be obscured. In reality, students who wish to participate in college athletics must undergo four main tests: they must be properly enrolled in the institution which they mean to represent, they must be physically fit for the sport in question, they must be in good scholastic standing, and they must be in good athletic standing. This last test includes both their previous record in athletics and the length of their participation in college athletics. In view of all these requirements, then, it is evident that although analysis may be a very effective method of explanation, it is not an easy one. In fact, to use it in more than an elementary way requires a distinctly analytic mind. And analytic power is about as rare as it is practically important.

B. Definition

A second method of exposition is definition. The logicians seem to differ among themselves about the essential nature and form of a definition, but we need only to understand that one way of making a matter clear is by showing its limits. This is just what the father does when he improvises an answer to his child's question, "What is a dynamo?" It is just what the teacher does when he seeks to give his pupil an adequate conception of a participle or an infinitive. It is just what everyone must be doing continually in meeting the demands of life, since all are called upon to make definitions of one kind or another. It may be that a single word needs brief explanation because it is new and strange. It may be that a term is used — like catholic, democratic, realism, or beauty — which needs full and explicit interpretation because it can easily be understood

in different ways. Or it may be that the whole problem is to state some fundamental conception; for instance, to define a gentleman, the classic spirit, or the rights of labor. In all such cases the explanation is made largely, if not entirely, by definition, since it is plain that to define is the surest way of gaining clearness and accuracy.

Nevertheless, a definition cannot be satisfactory unless it sets true limits and is clearly phrased. If one should say, for example, that a square is a figure with four equal sides, or a figure with four right angles, he would have an imperfect definition, because in either case it would fail to set limits that would exclude all figures other than rectangles with equal sides. Or again, if one should say that a chair is a movable seat, made of wood, with back and arms, intended for the accommodation of one person, the definition would be bad, because it would not include chairs without arms and chairs made of some material other than wood. Furthermore, if one should define narration as that kind of writing which narrates, obviously no real explanation would be effected, because the reader would still need to know the meaning of "narrate." Finally, if we should define a gyroscope as an instrument designed to illustrate the dynamics of rotating bodies, the definition would scarcely help matters much, since the terms of the definition would be familiar to few except trained scientists. It is evident, then, from these simple examples that if a definition is to be valuable as a means of explanation, it must accurately exclude all that should be excluded; it must include all that should be included; it must be free from derivatives of the words denoting the idea to be defined; and it must be expressed in terms altogether familiar to the reader.

C. Exemplification

A third means of exposition is exemplification. Perhaps no method of explaining is simpler and more natural than this. How inevitable it is may be seen in our daily experience when we meet an inquirer with such a remark as, "Wait a little and

I'll show you one," or " Why, this is one right here." Suppose that we are asked to explain what chintz is, or the meaning of the term "begging the question," or our idea of a "good fellow"; it will undoubtedly be easier to cite particular instances of each than to frame a satisfactory definition, or to make complete analysis. This method is effective, too, because it is absolutely specific. The concrete and the specific usually mean more to the ordinary person than the abstract and the general, and touch his interest more directly and vitally. One may write page after page explaining the importance of imagination in business, defining imagination and analyzing its part in business success, and yet fail to be altogether clear; but when two bootblacks are introduced, one of whom used imagination to his practical advantage over the other, the whole matter is lighted up and made impressive.[1] Consequently this method is much used, especially in any explanatory writing which must enlist the interest of a wide variety of readers. Indeed in popular exposition the method is often pushed to an extreme which is close to narrative.

But exposition by exemplification has its drawbacks. It is quite possible that a particular instance cited will not always be completely typical, in which case the explanation will be misleading or inaccurate. If one were to name the essays of Elia to explain the nature of exposition, there would be an obvious fault in the reader's consequent conception. Even if several instances are used, instead of one, in order to make the exemplification more perfectly representative, it is impossible to be sure of accuracy; one cannot be certain of his reader's power of generalization, that is, his power to infer for himself the exact nature of the matter under explanation. Not everyone who sees a square drawn on a piece of paper can infer for himself that a square must always have equal sides and equal angles. Likewise it is by no means certain that everyone who hears the specific instances which Cardinal Newman cites in his famous explanation of the gentleman can generalize on his own

[1] Lorin F. Deland, *Imagination in Business*. Harper and Brothers, 1909.

account sufficiently to get Newman's definition of a gentleman as one who never inflicts pain. Hence careful explanation often requires that exemplification be used in combination with some other method, usually analysis or definition.

D. Comparison

Then again, explanation can be effected by comparison. This method, seen in the figurative word as well as in the more elaborate illustration, is so simple that it needs little comment. Whenever anything strange is to be explained, it is obviously helpful to find something which is essentially similar and also familiar to the reader, and then to make the one clear through its likeness to the other. For instance, it is easy to understand how the Iroquois built his house, if it is compared with an arbor overarching a garden walk;[1] and there is no better way of explaining the operation of habit than by the old comparison with a creased sheet of paper. This method is valuable, too, even when it is not the only means of securing clearness; comparisons are perforce concrete, and besides making the explanation more intelligible they grip the reader's mind. In the expository writings of Franklin, Lowell, Macaulay, and Stevenson comparison contributes largely to effectiveness; and it is well known how Lincoln used anecdotes to show his point of view and simplify difficult explanations. To be useful, however, any comparison, like any figure of speech, must be familiar to the reader and it must be based on a real likeness; a likeness in essentials, not incidentals; a likeness clear enough to seem naturally drawn. Still, even the most perfect comparison, like the most perfect example, can hardly carry an entire explanation. Both are most valuable when they supplement analysis or definition.

E. Contrast

Finally, effective explanation can be gained through contrast, the negative of comparison. Although it is the likeness of two

[1] Parkman, *The Jesuits in North America*. Introduction.

things which usually illumines an explanation, there are some things which are best understood through their unlikeness. Everyone knows how the jeweler, the painter, and the architect use contrast in getting visual effects; and it has a similar value in matters purely intellectual. For instance, the traveler has abundant chance to understand many things about the political principles and social customs of a foreign country through their essential unlikeness to things at home; and upon his return he realizes many things about the life and institutions of his native land which he had never observed before. In like manner the expository writer may make an explanation clear by showing the points of difference between the matter under discussion and some other matter familiar to his reader. He may adopt merely an antithetical arrangement of phrases or clauses in a sentence, as in Dr. Johnson's oft-quoted contrast of Dryden and Pope, "If the flights of Dryden are higher, Pope continues longer on the wing"; or his purpose in an entire article may be one of differentiation, as in Mr. Brownell's chapter on New York after Paris at the end of his *French Traits*. But exposition by contrast is especially useful in explaining ideas which are easily confused with other ideas. To give a satisfactory explanation of such widely separated policies as protection and free trade without contrasting the one with the other would be entirely possible, though not natural; but to make a clear and unmistakable explanation of wit without contrasting it with humor, or of morality without showing how it differs from religion, would be practically impossible. So in the making of close distinctions contrast becomes an almost indispensable auxiliary of definition.

F. The Methods in Combination

Much of what has been said in the preceding paragraphs shows the advantage of adopting some combination of these expository methods rather than of depending on a single one of them. Each may have its special value when applied to a

particular problem. One may tend to give an explanation simplicity, another exactness; one may make it lucid, another interesting. But several of these methods taken together will secure the quality most essential, without the sacrifice of any other that may be highly desirable. In this connection it will be decidedly instructive to study the work of skilled writers. The following paragraphs, chosen to represent various types of exposition, do not by any means exhaust the possibilities of combining the methods effectively.

(1) Three large influences make for a mutual understanding from folk to folk. The first is the newspaper, which every morning prints information from the uttermost parts of the earth. The second is travel, which teaches a multitude of people that the Chinaman, the Turk, the Zulu, and the Mexican are, after all, rather agreeable people. The third influence is the internationalization of men of learning in their world-congresses of doctors, of publicists, of engineers, of journalists, of what not, which have a mighty effect in breaking down the feeling that a man is dangerous to you because he uses strange sounds, eats out of an unaccustomed kettle, and wears his traditional costume.[1]

(2) What is a great man? Common speech, which after all must be our guide to the sense of the terms which the world uses, gives this name to many sorts of men. How far greatness lies in the power and range of the intellect, how far in the strength of the will, how far in elevation of view and aim and purpose, this is a question too large to be debated here. But of Abraham Lincoln it may be truly said that in his greatness all three elements were present. He had not the brilliance, either in thought or word or act, that dazzles, nor the restless activity that occasionally pushes to the front even persons with gifts not of the first order. He was a patient, thoughtful, melancholy man, whose intelligence, working sometimes slowly, but always steadily and surely, was capacious enough to embrace and vigorous enough to master the incomparably difficult facts and problems he was called to deal with. His executive talent showed itself not in sudden and startling strokes but in the calm serenity with which he formed his judgments and laid his plans, in the undismayed firmness with which he adhered to them in the face of popular clamor, of conflicting counsels from his advisers, sometimes, even, of what others deemed all but hopeless failure. These were the qualities needed in one who had to pilot the republic through the heaviest storm that had ever broken upon it. But the mainspring of his power, and the truest evidence of his greatness, lay in the nobility of his aims, in the fervor of his

[1] Albert Bushnell Hart, *School Books and International Prejudices.*

conviction, in the stainless rectitude which guided his action and won for him the confidence of the people. Without these things neither the vigor of his intellect nor the firmness of his will would have availed.[1]

(3) The article of consumption most often neglected is leisure. Leisure is an indispensable element of all enjoyment. It is the thing in which the American, despite his overflowing wealth, is the poorest.

Americans have never taken time and still do not take time for leisure. We seek to telescope our pleasures, to enjoy much in little time. As a nation we are like the instantaneous American traveler who does the Louvre in an hour and the Vatican in half a morning. We are obsessed by the doctrine of a strenuous life, of a life of effort and labor, without leisure or quiet development.

The American conception of leisure has always been one of mild disapprobation. There was rather a feeling that we should live to labor, not labor to live. This conception, which was more or less explicable during the days of the conquest of the continent, is not a little ludicrous to-day, when advanced by the financier who is benefiting by our accumulating surplus. An austere disapprobation of holidays is also given expression by many of our newspapers, and when, to please the Italian vote, a State legislature made Columbus Day a holiday, some of our journals preached eloquent sermons against idle workmen, supine legislators, and reckless Genoese sailors. In the eyes of these journals and many well-meaning manufacturers and professional men, the workman should prefer to work twelve hours instead of eight, if by working four hours more he earns more.

What is, however, more needed in America than almost anything else is a wider leisure and a better knowledge of how to use it. We need shorter hours for workman, merchant, banker, lawyer, doctor, engineer. The American who has made his money and now dies of ennui represents the situation at one end of the line; the Polish workman in a steel mill who labors all day and every day, Sunday, week-day, and holiday, represents it at the other. Between the two we have the "ambitious," "self-respecting," hard-working man, with no idea but labor. What does he earn, this tame, virtuous, self-driven, over-ambitious drudge? More dollars in the bank, fewer years of life, and fewer pleasures while he lives. Better a "sturdy beggar" or a vermin-infested tramp than a desiccated toiler who works twelve hours a day, seven days in the week, fifty-two weeks in the year.[2]

(4) Of all the devices for promoting a good understanding the old-fashioned Preface was the most excellent. It was not an introduction to the subject, its purpose was personal. In these days the Preface, where it survives, is reduced to the smallest possible space. It is like the platform of an

[1] James Bryce, *Abraham Lincoln's Speeches and Letters*. The Macmillan Company.

[2] Walter E. Weyl, *The New Democracy*, Chap. XIX. The Macmillan Company.

electric car which affords the passenger a precarious foothold while he strives to obey the stern demand of the conductor that he move forward. But time was when the Preface was the broad hospitable porch on which the Author and Reader sat for an hour or so and talked over the enterprise that was before them. Sometimes they would talk so long that they almost forgot their ostensible subject.[1]

(5) The human species, according to the best theory I can form of it, is composed of two distinct races, the men who borrow, and the men who lend. To these two original diversities may be reduced all those impertinent classifications of Gothic and Celtic tribes, white men, black men, red men. All the dwellers upon earth, "Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites," flock hither, and do naturally fall in with one or other of these primary distinctions. The infinite superiority of the former, which I choose to designate as the great race, is discernible in their figure, port, and a certain instinctive sovereignty. The latter are born degraded. "He shall serve his brethren." There is something in the air of one of this cast, lean and suspicious; contrasting with the open, trusting, generous manner of the other.[2]

III. EFFECTIVENESS IN EXPOSITION

A. In Instrumental Exposition

1. Standards of effectiveness. — In the nature of the case, instrumental exposition, which is written to meet some demand for information or opinion, can be effective only when it explains with entire clearness. In untangling some complex financial matter, in giving instruction about some industrial process, in presenting some national problem, in setting forth some principle of science or of art, the writer cannot in any sense succeed if he is not exact beyond the possibility of vagueness, and simple beyond the possibility of obscurity. He must reach the mind of his reader without error and with the minimum of resistance. Incidentally, it is this rigid demand for crystal clearness which makes practice in expository composition particularly valuable to the writer's own mind, clarifying his thought and stimulating his mental activity. But we must admit that this intellectual clearness, without any element of personal feeling or human interest, leaves instrumental exposition too cold and impersonal.

[1] Samuel McChord Crothers, *The Gentle Reader*. Houghton Mifflin Company.
[2] Charles Lamb, *The Two Races of Men*.

Much instrumental exposition, — and sometimes the most authoritative, — goes unread, even when it is entirely clear. It fails as communication, simply because the writer is at no pains to relate his writing to his reader's life, to make him feel that what is said really concerns him.

In this connection, too, we must consider making instrumental exposition permanently effective. Of course, so many of the explanations in daily life involve technical or ephemeral material, and so many of them are written hastily, that instrumental exposition is often denied the quality essential to higher literary art. Few business letters are intended to reach more than one individual. The newspaper reporter frankly acknowledges that he writes of a day and for a day. In truth, anyone who attempts to convey facts or ideas to the public is frequently embarrassed by some advance in knowledge which renders his writing out of date and hence valueless. And yet no writer has good reason to be satisfied with his explanation until he has breathed into it the breath of his own personality and made his workmanship as perfect as possible. Any letter, any article, any book will reach more people, be reread oftener, and continue to be read longer, if it is written with charm as well as clearness. Furthermore, it occasionally happens that some piece of instrumental exposition which no longer has much value so far as its information goes, — Isaac Walton's *Compleat Angler*, for example, — is still read by thousands because of the author's personality and his perpetually delightful grace of expression. Full effectiveness in this most practical of all forms of writing, therefore, demands that the writer meet all three of the conditions which have been laid down in the preceding chapter. Without satisfying the demands of good form, as well as having his material thoroughly in hand and enlisting his reader's interest, no writer of instrumental exposition can have more than a superficial or temporary success.

2. The application of general principles. — Any degree of effectiveness in instrumental exposition depends in large measure on the careful following of the general principles and

procedure which have already been explained in the first part of this book. Indeed, no kind of writing permits as direct an application of the general principles of composition and involves as little modification of them to suit special problems as does formal exposition. Thus the first thing which is essential to the clearness of an explanation is that the writer shall have one thing in mind to say and say it without irrelevancy or digression. But this means nothing more than unity of conception and unity of substance. Another thing which is highly conducive to clearness and intellectual interest is the arrangement of the material; facts or ideas which are logically related must be grouped together and then given the order which the reader can follow most easily. It may be that the material is arranged according to successive steps, as in explaining a process, or according to space relations, as in explaining the structure of an animal or the situation of a city. More often it is arranged so that what is simple comes before what is complex, and what is relatively insignificant before what is highly important. In any case, all of this is simply a matter of the writer's organizing his material according to some plan and making his piece coherent through logical sequence and smooth transitions. Then again, it is desirable that an explanation be well balanced. This is essentially emphasis by proportion. Sometimes, too, it is possible to employ the skillful repetition of important points, — iterative emphasis. In a smaller way, the clearness of an explanation is increased if the central idea of a paragraph is given to the reader explicitly through a topic sentence; and this idea can be brought out sharply if the topic sentence is placed at the beginning or at the end; all of which involves no more than applying the principles of unity and emphasis skillfully to the expository paragraph. Obviously, too, the reader of an explanation ought not to be confused with many words or misled by loose phrasing; that is, the writer should be influenced in his choice of words primarily by precision and economy.

3. Special suggestions. — Further than this, some special

suggestions may be given to the writer of instrumental exposition. For instance, it is quite worth while to give attention to the selection of a title. It is generally agreed that a good title in this kind of composition must state the writer's theme as specifically as possible without being too long or otherwise awkward. Accordingly, we find many titles of essays and books and chapters in books which are just plain, accurate labels, such as the following: *The Meaning of Education*, *Imagination in Business*, *The Moral Equivalent of War*. And these are excellent in their way. But it is often possible to get a title which is no less satisfactory for purposes of information or reference and which has also some power of attraction. It may be that the title challenges attention because it is put in the form of a question, as *Why go to College?* and *Democracy or Dynamite?* Alliteration, too, may help to make an impression, as in *The People at Play*, *Excursions of an Evolutionist*, or *Competition in College*. Unless it seems wholly incidental and unconscious, however, this device is too artificial and cheap to be really effective. Very often a single vigorous, expressive word will give a title more than ordinary significance, as in *Treadmill Justice*, *The Quest of the Perfect Rose*, or *China's Grapple with the Opium Evil*. Sometimes a title excites interest because it is modeled after some phrase which is very familiar; for example, *The Old Order Changeth*, *The Whole Duty of Critics*, and *How to Live on Twenty-Four Hours a Day*. Furthermore, it is possible to throw the entire title into figurative form, although it may be difficult to make the figure give enough information about the subject to be presented. *Kings' Treasuries*, *The Ghost of the Heath*, and *Human Bullets* are peculiarly appropriate titles for pieces dealing with the riches in books, the reclamation of Danish wastes, and the spirit of the Japanese soldier; they suggest the germ ideas of these three pieces, and are sure to stick in the mind. It may be seen, therefore, that the writer can often afford to sacrifice explicit information in order to make a title attractive, if thereby he can gain initial interest and impress his central thought on the reader's memory.

This same policy is sound in determining how to begin. Unity always requires a pertinent beginning, and emphasis requires one that is worth the prominence it gets by virtue of its position. Moreover, the psychology of any problem in explanation requires that the writer give his reader something simple and familiar at the outset. He must enlist interest and at the same time lay the foundations for an adequate understanding of the subject. Of course, there is no one way to do this. The best way in any given case will depend on the particular writer, the particular reader, and the particular material, as is evident in the following specimens:

(1) This is not a handbook of poetics; and its aim is not to consider the several departments of poetry, — epic and lyric and dramatic. It does not deal with simile and metaphor, nor does it seek to open the mind of the student to the nobler beauties of poetry. It is intended to be an introduction to the study of versification, of the metrical mechanism which sustains poetry, and which differentiates poetry from prose. It is devoted solely to the technic of the art of verse.[1]

(2) Among the influences which, in America, promote harmony between alien races the Public School plays a most important part. The children, the teachers, the parents — whether of emigrant or native origin — the relatives and friends in distant countries, are all brought more or less under its amalgamating influences. In the schoolroom the child finds friends and playmates belonging to races widely different from his own; there Greek meets not only Greek, but Turk, American, Irish, German, French, English, Italian, and Hungarian, and representatives of every other nation under the sun. The lion lying down with the lamb was nothing to it, because the lamb, though his feelings are not enlarged upon, must have been distinctly uncomfortable. But in the schoolroom Jew and Gentile work and play together; the black and white learn love and knowledge side by side. And long after more formal instruction has faded with the passing of the years, a man of, perhaps, German origin will think kindly of the whole irresponsible Irish race when he remembers little Bridget O'Connor, who sat across the aisle in the old Cherry Street School, her quick temper and her swift remorse.[2]

(3) A few years ago the American Protestant Episcopal Church was occupied at its annual Convention in revising its liturgy. It was thought de-

[1] Brander Matthews, *A Study of Versification.* Houghton Mifflin Company.

[2] Myra Kelly, *The American Public School as a Factor in International Conciliation.*

sirable to introduce among the short sentence prayers a prayer for the whole people; and an eminent New England divine proposed the words "O Lord, bless our nation." Accepted one afternoon on the spur of the moment, the sentence was brought up next day for reconsideration, when so many objections were raised by the laity to the word "nation," as importing too definite a recognition of national unity, that it was dropped, and instead there were adopted the words "O Lord, bless these United States."

To Europeans who are struck by the patriotism and demonstrative national pride of their transatlantic visitors, this fear of admitting that the American people constitute a nation seems extraordinary.[1]

Whether, then, a writer of instrumental exposition uses a formal announcement of purpose or method to preface his actual explanation, or plunges directly into his subject, or picks some concrete material, attractive and suggestive, which will at once take hold in the reader's mind, is a nice problem in literary strategy.

But before an explanation goes very far the writer is almost sure to employ words which require special attention. Considering the constant difficulty of accurate self-expression and the special demand for exact clearness in exposition, it is imperative that the expository writer take the utmost care in his use of terms. It is not enough that he avoid all looseness in phrasing. By explicit definition he must insure himself against possible misunderstanding and misinterpretation. Often he may well take time at the very outset to establish his particular meaning for the terms which are fundamental to the whole body of his thought, as does Matthew Arnold in the opening pages of *Culture and Anarchy*. Or, again, as he proceeds with his explanation, he will find it necessary to paraphrase in a less formal way some word or phrase which is rather incidental. Thus Arnold pauses in his essay on Wordsworth to interpret the term "moral," and Newman remarks somewhat casually that "it is almost a definition of a gentleman to say he is one who never inflicts pain." In any case, successful explanation demands that every term be familiar to the reader and that it be understood by him exactly as it was by the writer.

[1] James Bryce, *The American Commonwealth*, Chap. II. Copyright 1893–1910 by The Macmillan Company.

Furthermore, the clearness of an explanation can be increased by making the outline prominent. It is obvious that some organization of the material is absolutely necessary in all writing; and certainly no one can question the special importance of structure in exposition. But structure which is too much concealed misses some of its value. The plan of any explanation can be of use to the reader as well as to the writer, inasmuch as a reader is greatly aided if he can use the writer's outline as a kind of mental chart. Nor is there any reason why writing should seem stiff and mechanical because the writer makes plain his order of procedure. It is not at all necessary that he announce his plan at the beginning or exhibit it at the end, if there is reasonable objection to either of these methods. In fact, the most useful as well as the most skillful way of revealing structure may be to let it appear incidentally throughout the course of the explanation. The transitions from part to part can be shown by explicit statements, or incidental summaries, or summarizing connectives, which need not be in the least awkward. At the same time the reader is never left in doubt about the progress of the thought. In this way Mr. Bryce helps his reader to follow him when he explains why great men are not chosen presidents in the United States,[1] and in this way Huxley leads his reader through such relatively difficult discussions as those on *Yeast* and *The Physical Basis of Life*.

No means of securing effectiveness in instrumental exposition, however, is more conducive both to clearness and to interest than the free use of the concrete and the specific. To be sure, it is often far easier to write in general terms; and some writers even scorn to do otherwise because they court the effect of profundity. But as a matter of fact, the average man does not really grasp anything abstract until it has been translated into the concrete. No writing is duller or more difficult for him than that which is without the enlivening presence of abundant concrete details. As Professor Gardiner has said, "It is to be remembered that the object of all explanation is to satisfy the

[1] James Bryce, *The American Commonwealth*, Chap. VIII.

irrepressible instinct of man to understand the universe; and this universe is made up, not of hazy abstractions, but of hard and concrete facts. The men who have added to this understanding of the world have been the men who have made it possible to see more of the meaning of the real things of the world: men like Newton, who showed that the sun and the moon and the stars obey the same law as the falling stone; men like Franklin and his successors in electricity, who have brought together the thunderbolt and the crackling when you rub a cat's back; men like Tyndall, who have made it a matter of common knowledge that the physical sensations which we call heat and light are bound up in a common origin and controlled by common laws. Indeed, it is not one of the least achievements of the nineteenth century that it has recognized that the real advances in thought are made not so much by the men of agile logical power as by men who have stuck patiently to the obstinate facts of the concrete world." [1] Without doubt, then, the effective writer will fill his exposition with concrete details and specific instances.

Little can be said to show just how a writer can best make his work more concrete, beyond what has been said in the preceding pages. Manifestly he must search for concrete words, words that have the best carrying power. He ought also to make free use of the more specific methods of exposition, — exemplification, comparison, and contrast, — since these methods not only provide material that is specific, but also permit sympathetic adaptation of it to the experience and interest of a given reader. Then, too, it is well for him to make free use of incidental description and narration. By these essentially concrete and imaginative forms he can both grip the reader's understanding and stir his imagination. Thus Macaulay greatly increases the vividness of his explanation of the English coffee-house by the use of descriptive imagery,[2] and Dean Briggs

[1] John Hays Gardiner, *The Forms of Prose Literature*, pp. 52–53. Charles Scribner's Sons.

[2] Macaulay, *History of England*, Chap. III.

enlivens and illumines his discussion of college problems by telling simple incidents from his experience with Harvard students.[1] Furthermore, the use of diagrams, which is a convenient device in any explanation of structure, and the use of pictures, which is a common expedient in magazine articles and books intended to reach the people at large, are by no means illegitimate ways of increasing the effectiveness of instrumental exposition. Because they enable the reader to visualize the concrete, they not only attract his attention, but sharpen his perception of the matter presented.

It may be noted in passing that the use of the concrete in exposition is sometimes extended even to the point of making the whole explanation by description or narration. Everyone is familiar with the attempts to inform children about rain through the story of a raindrop, or to instruct them in matters of coinage and currency by means of the autobiography of a penny. And this same method may be effective in other than juvenile writing, for the grown-up has his childish delight in pictures and stories along with the thoughtfulness of maturity. Thus a writer who undertakes to explain how to sell books by an account of what one successful book agent did and said on a particular trip may suggest all the instructions that are necessary. Or, instead of a continuous narrative, a writer may arrange several scenes or incidents after the fashion of a series of lantern slides. To explain the evil effects of our present industrial system on the boys employed, he may crystallize the whole matter into a few situations found in one furniture factory. First, he will give an interview with the owner of the factory in his private office, then a conversation with the superintendent of one of the departments where the boys are at work, a picture of the boys and men passing out of the gate at noon, an interview with one of the factory youths found lounging in front of a pool room in the evening, and finally the comment of a high school pupil who worked in the factory during a summer vacation. In this dramatic way one of the menaces of the

[1] Le Baron Russell Briggs. The Mistakes of College Life, in *Routine and Ideals*.

" system " is flashed across the reader's mind. It is, after all, nothing more than pushing the method of exposition by exemplification to its logical extreme ; — one specific instance, or a combination of several, so chosen and presented as to be typical of a general process or movement. It can be very effective, too, provided the writer uses instances of the particular which faithfully represent the general, and provided he can command sufficient graphic power and narrative skill to make the necessary impress upon his reader's imagination. Unless it is used very skillfully and conscientiously, however, it easily gives a misleading interpretation of the facts or degenerates into a crude form of purpose narrative.

Finally, the writer of instrumental exposition must know how to make a good ending. It is highly important that he stop at once when he is through ; yet a good conclusion is more than mere stopping. An abrupt, haphazard ending bewilders the reader just as an ending that is weak and flat disappoints him. Presumably it is natural to place last whatever is most important for the reader to remember. It may be that the writer will carefully summarize all that he has said, as do Greenough and Kittredge in their chapter, *Language is Poetry:*

> Thus we have subjected the principle that 'language is poetry' to a variety of tests. We have compared specific passages of poetry with ordinary phraseology, and have found a similarly metaphorical character in both. We have observed the imaginative nature of the development of many meanings from a simple root-idea. We have recognized the existence of many so-called 'figures of speech' in the commonest locutions of everyday life. We may feel certain, therefore, that the principle is a sound one, and may utilize it whenever it appears to be useful in our further study of English words.[1]

But this form of conclusion has become somewhat stereotyped ; unless the purpose is severely informational, a summary often seems rather too formal and academic. A variation of this method may be made by bringing all the thought into one generali-

[1] Greenough and Kittredge, *Words and Their Ways in English Speech*, Chap. II. Copyright by The Macmillan Company.

zation. This is effective because, instead of merely restating what has been said, it gives the individual points a new and broader significance. Another way of clinching what has been said is to use the idea at the end that was used at the beginning. Sometimes it is even possible to repeat a significant sentence from the initial paragraph or to paraphrase the title. In this way the reader recognizes that he has been brought back to the point where he started, and is pleased with the sense of having completed the circuit of thought. This device, if it does not seem artificial, is really a very useful one, for it makes unity evident and emphasizes the central idea strikingly. But instead of repeating in any way what he has said before, the writer may find it better to bring his exposition up to a high point and end there. In case he uses such a climactic ending, he will almost of necessity have to find some exalted idea to leave with his reader, as does William Morris in closing his lecture on *The Art of the People:*

> Meanwhile, if these hours be dark, as, indeed, in many ways they are, at least do not let us sit deedless, like fools and fine gentlemen, thinking the common toil not good enough for us, and beaten by the muddle; but rather let us work like good fellows trying by some dim candlelight to set our workshop ready against to-morrow's daylight — that to-morrow, when the civilized world, no longer greedy, strifeful, and destructive, shall have a new art, a glorious art, made by the people and for the people, as a happiness to the maker and the user.[1]

There is the possibility, too, of ending with an interrogation point. Although it is doubtful whether, in expository writing, it is ever wise to tease the reader's curiosity, a writer who is discussing some difficult social or political problem which is without definite solution may well end with a stimulating question, an appeal for the reader's continued thoughtfulness. But whatever the particular way of ending may be, the writer must realize that his last word is not only his last chance, but in many ways his best chance. If it is important for him to " get his man " in the beginning, it is doubly important for him to " have his man " at the end.

[1] Longmans, Green, and Company.

B. In Æsthetic Exposition

1. Standards of effectiveness. — So far as the expository writing of the world is concerned, it is evident that most of it is instrumental. But there is some expression of opinion, some passing of comment, some writing that is chiefly expository, quite outside the businesslike communication and instruction of the world of affairs. It appears, for instance, in the brisk, sprightly, charming letters which are exchanged between friends who have ideas and find delight in giving them fit expression. Then, too, there is the informal essay, wherein the writer makes his leisurely observations and reflections the subject-matter for a pleasant chat with the reader who has time to listen. Obviously in exposition of this sort effectiveness is to be measured primarily by the power of the writing to charm the reader rather than by its accuracy and clearness. Indeed, æsthetic exposition is so loosely expository in nature, with its large use of the concrete, its free mingling with description and narration, that it must be measured by standards of its own.

2. Application of general principles. — To be sure, effectiveness in æsthetic exposition implies the skillful application of all the principles of composition. It may seem that Lamb's *Old China* has no unity because of the many things which are mentioned therein besides china, and no coherence because the paragraphs ramble along without marking off definite stages in the development of the thought; but there is a single idea in the piece, nevertheless, and everything holds together perfectly. The truth is, in writing which is even partly pictorial and imaginative, the principles cannot be applied in the severely logical way in which they are applied to analytical writing. In any one of Lamb's essays there certainly is unity; but it is a matter of dominant impression rather than of strict logical relevancy. Similarly, there is no lack of coherence; but the parts fit together closely and smoothly more because they are fused by the warmth of the writer's sentiment than because they are compressed by the power of cold reasoning.

In addition to this faithful following of the spirit of the great literary laws, the writer of æsthetic exposition must bear in mind all else that makes for effectiveness in writing generally. He should always write sincerely, even when his mood is playful, and adapt his material to his reader sympathetically. He should begin attractively and end in a way that will give his reader a lingering pleasure over his ideas and his style. In particular he should make abundant use of concrete details chosen because of their suggestive value, and feel free to introduce bits of description or narration whenever an appeal to the senses can help to stir the reader's imagination, or a recounting of experiences can serve to illustrate a point. Above all, he must be careful of his diction and of every detail of execution. In the informal essay or the friendly letter neither a long and logically sustained course of thought nor a prolonged series of entangled incidents is present to hold the reader's interest, and finish is correspondingly important. Indeed, it is often said that the essay represents the quintessence of literature. Without literary quality it cannot be highly effective.

3. Special suggestions. — Two special suggestions may be made for securing effectiveness in æsthetic exposition. In the first place, the writer ought to let himself go. He must have a good opinion of himself and not be ashamed of the pronoun "I." Nothing gives more charm to the letter or the essay of the sort we are here considering than the free play of the writer's personality. We delight to read such writing very much as we delight to engage a fascinating acquaintance in conversation, because we find the individual himself charming. And this individuality can leave its impress in countless ways. The title of an essay may be colored with it, as are so many of the titles used by Dr. Crothers and Dr. Van Dyke. Or, the opening lines of the piece, wherein some personal fancy steals out or some hobby is confessed, may greet the reader like a breath of fragrant morning air suggesting the beauty of the day to come. So Leigh Hunt wins every kindred spirit whose eye falls on the first few sentences of his *A Day by the Fire* and Hazlitt puts

us on terms of easy intimacy with himself at once as we begin his essay *On Living to One's Self*. But really the whole piece from beginning to end must be intensely individualized. The writer ought to talk easily about whatever interests him — some pleasant whim or engaging bit of sentiment, some innocent fancy or sober reflection, some favorite pastime or pet aversion — and do it in a manner entirely original. It should no more be possible for another person to clothe these thoughts in the same words than for him to have the same thoughts. Certainly no one but Charles Lamb could have given us Elia's essays; no one but Robert Louis Stevenson could have written for "Mr. Fastidious Brisk." As the author of *The Gentle Reader* observes, literature of this sort ought to give a picture of a man's disposition. Indeed the only check on a writer's writing himself into his production is that set by his own sense of humor. He must not be awkward or offend delicacy. He must not be morbidly introspective or pessimistic — the world has unhappiness enough. Otherwise, he can be as odd as he likes and push himself forward as much as he likes. So long as he is good-natured and graceful in his self-revelation, his confessions and opinions will be delightful.

Then, too, it will usually add to the effectiveness of æsthetic exposition if the writer weaves a colored thread of some sort into his piece. It may be the "golden woof thread of romance" that is used. It may be a thread of tender sentiment, as in Lamb's exquisite *Dream Children*, or one of mock seriousness, as in his *Two Races of Men*. In fact, the possibilities are well-nigh limitless, with pathos and humor and satire and all the shadings and combinations of these that are familiar to every lover of the essay. In the following well-known passage from Kenneth Grahame's *Golden Age*, which illustrates many another point of effectiveness, there is a particularly happy use of topsy-turvy humor:

> These elders, our betters by a trick of chance, commanded no respect, but only a certain blend of envy — of their good luck — and pity — for their inability to make use of it. Indeed, it was one of the most hopeless

features in their character (when we troubled ourselves to waste a thought on them: which wasn't often) that, having absolute license to indulge in the pleasures of life, they could get no good of it. They might dabble in the pond all day, hunt the chickens, climb trees in the most uncompromising Sunday clothes; they were free to issue forth and buy gunpowder in the full eye of the sun — free to fire cannons and explode mines on the lawn: yet they never did any one of these things. No irresistible Energy haled them to church o' Sundays; yet they went there regularly of their own accord, though they betrayed no greater delight in the experience than ourselves.

On the whole, the existence of these Olympians seemed to be entirely void of interests, even as their movements were confined and slow, and their habits stereotyped and senseless. To anything but appearances they were blind. For them the orchard (a place elf-haunted, wonderful!) simply produced so many apples and cherries: or it didn't, when the failures of Nature were not infrequently ascribed to us. They never set foot within fir-wood or hazel-copse, nor dreamt of the marvels hid therein. The mysterious sources — sources as of old Nile — that fed the duck-pond had no magic for them. They were unaware of Indians, nor recked they anything of bisons or pirates (with pistols!), though the whole place swarmed with such portents. They cared not about exploring for robbers' caves, nor digging for hidden treasure. Perhaps, indeed, it was one of their best qualities that they spent the greater part of their time stuffily indoors.

* * * * * * *

It was incessant matter for amazement how these Olympians would talk over our heads — during meals, for instance — of this or the other social or political inanity, under the delusion that these pale phantasms of reality were among the importances of life. We *illuminati*, eating silently, our heads full of plans and conspiracies, could have told them what real life was. We had just left it outside, and were all on fire to get back to it. Of course we didn't waste the revelation on them; the futility of imparting our ideas had long been demonstrated. One in thought and purpose, linked by the necessity of combating one hostile fate, a power antagonistic ever, — a power we lived to evade, — we had no confidants save ourselves. This strange anæmic order of beings was further removed from us, in fact, than the kindly beasts who shared our natural existence in the sun. The estrangement was fortified by an abiding sense of injustice, arising from the refusal of the Olympians ever to defend, retract, or admit themselves in the wrong, or to accept similar concessions on our part. For instance, when I flung the cat out of an upper window (though I did it from no ill-feeling, and it didn't hurt the cat), I was ready, after a moment's reflection, to own I was wrong, as a gentleman should. But was the matter allowed to end there? I trow not. Again, when Harold was locked up in his room all day, for assault

and battery upon a neighbor's pig, — an action he would have scorned, being indeed on the friendliest terms with the porker in question, — there was no handsome expression of regret on the discovery of the real culprit. What Harold had felt was not so much the imprisonment, — indeed he had very soon escaped by the window, with assistance from his allies, and had only gone back in time for his release, — as the Olympian habit. A word would have set all right; but of course that word was never spoken.[1]

READINGS AND EXERCISES

1. Read the first chapter of Stevenson's *Travels with a Donkey*. You will find some passages which illustrate helpfully the relations of exposition and description. For instance, his account of his sleeping sack is primarily descriptive, yet it is really equivalent to an explanation of how all such sacks can be made. When he speaks of the horse as "a fine lady among animals," he makes a general characterization; but when he passes to Father Adam's donkey, he gives a particular picture.

2. To fix in mind the differences between the forms of composition, try to write pieces of exposition, description, and narration on each of the following: Frost, ice-harvesting, hazing, football, Hallowe'en, country school, James Whitcomb Riley.

3. If you have never realized how the dividing of a subject into parts helps to avoid confusion, read the humorous attempt at explaining baseball to a foreigner given in Gardiner, Kittredge, and Arnold's *Manual of Composition and Rhetoric*, pp. 163–164.

4. Try your own powers of analysis by preparing systematic answers to these questions: Why do college freshmen spell badly? Why are dogs interesting? Why do people go to church? Why is history a favorite study? Why do boys smoke cigarettes? Why do students "flunk"? Why is the *New York Sun* a widely known newspaper?

5. Study definition as an expository method by working out your conception of a well-educated man, of a well-dressed man, of college loyalty, and of sport for sport's sake. Are you content to use definition alone?

6. Huxley was a master of comparison. Read his explanation of three hypotheses about the splitting up of sugar during fermentation, in his lecture on *Yeast*. He compares them with three ways of

[1] Used by permission of the John Lane Company.

destroying a card house. Read further in his lectures and essays to find other examples of simple, illuminating comparison.

7. Can you explain the difference between wit and humor, imagination and fancy, speculation and investment, socialism and anarchy, grammar and rhetoric, "cramming" and study, the *Atlantic Monthly* and the *Century Magazine?* What methods besides contrast would be helpful in these cases?

8. Explain the following character types, using different expository methods in combination: The teacher's pet, the "tightwad," the infant terrible, the baseball fan, the health crank, the "mollycoddle," the village patriarch, the college sport, the river rat.

9. How does the relation of the writer to the reader differ in an article in a trade journal, a textbook, a newspaper editorial, and a personal essay? How does the difference in this relation affect methods of presentation and standards of effectiveness?

10. What do you think of the following as titles for pieces of instrumental exposition? *The Grist of the Gods; America's Greatest Menace; The Chemistry of Sleep; Making Bad Boys into Good Men; Young China at School; The Man in the Cage; Industrial Education; It; New Trials for Old Favorites; The Great American Sneeze; The Ghost of the Third Term; The College Man and Music; The Effect of Natural Scenery on National Character; Should Smith go to Church?*

11. Observe the various ways which expository writers find of beginning, and try to classify their methods, as you would the openings for a chess game. Can you make an absolute classification?

12. Have you ever tried to make your way about in a strange city with a guide? Did his occasional "Cross here" or "Turn to the right now" help you to avoid wrong turns and moments of confusion? Did his remark that "This street runs parallel with the river" or "All our avenues run north and south" help you to get some conception of the city as a whole? Do you expect the same kind of guidance from an author whom you read? How do skillful expository writers give these "directions at the corners," and yet save their work from being too stiff?

13. A preacher who was very successful in reaching the masses once said: "A sermon without illustrations is like a house without windows." With this thought in mind study some piece of effective exposition like Mr. Bryce's *The American Commonwealth* and observe the author's use of description and narrative.

14. Have you ever tried to illustrate any of your expository writing with diagrams or photographs or original sketches? What are the essentials of a really serviceable illustration?

15. Read Ernest Poole's article on *How the Chicago Art Institute Reaches the People*, in the *Outlook*, March 23, 1907, and Walter Weyl's article on *The Call of America*, in the same magazine, April 23, 1910. Can you find other examples of exposition done entirely or largely through the concrete? Are they effective?

16. Study the ending of Chapter XIV in *The American Commonwealth*. Observe the ways in which other skillful writers close their pieces of exposition. Do you ever find them using several methods in combination?

17. Independent criticism of a simple kind affords excellent training. Read Professor Brewster's Introduction to his *Specimens of Modern English Literary Criticism*, or Professor Gardiner's *Forms of Prose Literature*, pp. 88–101, in order to become familiar with the principal types of criticism. Then write out your opinions of a current novel, a volume of poems, or the whole body of an essayist's work. You need not confine yourself to books of literature if you are more deeply interested in music or painting or engineering.

18. Have you read Dean Briggs's *School, College, and Character?* Could you write an interesting opinion of the chapter on College Honor or the one on Fathers, Mothers, and Freshmen?

19. Could you comment informally and interestingly upon any of the following matters? Early rising, dreams, owning books, loaning books, reading aloud, umbrellas, blue Sunday, magic lines, photographs, nicknames, old-fashioned folks.

20. Do not fail to read something from the pen of each of the following present-day essayists: Samuel McChord Crothers, Henry Van Dyke, Kenneth Grahame, Augustine Birrell, Agnes Repplier, Edward Verrall Lucas.

CHAPTER VIII — ARGUMENTATION

I. THE FIELD OF ARGUMENTATION

A. The Relation of Argumentation to Exposition

Argumentation is the form of composition that seeks to produce belief or conviction concerning a matter about which there is doubt or indifference. It is like exposition in that it has explanation for its first purpose; it is unlike exposition in that it explains matters about which there is difference of belief or conviction, while exposition explains only those things about which there are different degrees of understanding. Sometimes a full explanation is all that is required to change a person's opinion or to convince him of his own error. In such cases, it may be seen at once, exposition performs the function of argumentation. Usually, however, when a person's understanding is interwoven with personal interest, personal desire, personal prejudice, and the personal indifference that sometimes results from prejudice, a successful effort to make him understand from one's own point of view involves awakening him from his indifference, breaking down his prejudice, appealing to his power of reason, and if need be, showing that the dictates of reason are favorable to his own selfish or unselfish interests. To accomplish all of these things is the work of him who would argue effectively.

The element of exposition in argumentation ought to save us from the error of confusing an argument with mere contentious strife. All of us, no doubt, are familiar with the man who is ever looking for an "argument," not in the hope that he may modify anybody's opinions, but that he may succeed in humiliating an opponent by proving him an ignoramus or a liar in the presence of others. This man ordinarily reveals his cheap

motive when he is fairly cornered. Instead of admitting his plight, he calls his opponent a fool, or if he doubts the advantage of that course, he seeks to cover up the weakness of his position by expressing surprise that anybody should thus maliciously try to misunderstand the matter at issue. Of course, petty wrangling of this character is not argument at all. It does not involve the first essential of argumentation; that is, clear and full explanation.

B. The Importance of Argumentation

Occasionally we hear the assertion that an argument serves no purpose, since an arguer never convinces those who hold an opposing view. This assertion is sometimes based on the false conception we have just considered, and sometimes on a cramped or hasty view of the results of an argument. It is true, undeniably, that few persons will sacrifice their pride by admitting immediately after they have been addressed argumentatively that they have been convinced. Nevertheless, in the course of the argument, either voluntarily, or, in an unguarded moment, involuntarily, they have recognized the weakness of some part of the position they maintain or the strength of some part of that maintained by an opponent. In this manner, through his influence, they modify their views slightly. In due time they build new opinions upon those which have been modified. As time carries them farther and farther away from the heat and antagonism of the discussion, their new opinions reveal more and more of the character of the modified views. Thus, eventually, the results of the argument become clearly evident.

Few people appreciate the large place that argumentation holds in the transactions of life. Too frequently it is looked upon as being useful only in formal forensics and intercollegiate debates. This view is deplorable and false. Argumentation is used wherever persons who differ in opinion seek to stand on common ground, or where one of them strives to have his position accepted by the others. Thus, in the business man's

efforts to increase trade, in the lawyer's addresses before the court or the jury, in the editor's defense of his political or ethical ideals, in the minister's plea for religious development, in the teacher's direction of his pupils' opinions, in the countless persuasive personal letters which men and women of every calling or occupation write, and in the broken, disjointed conversation of daily life, argument must be employed. In fact, argumentative principles and argumentative procedure are involved whenever one makes an effort to increase one's influence in any direction.

Happily, the value of argumentation is not limited to the immediate influence which the arguer gains by convincing his fellow beings; it extends to the permanent shaping of his own mental powers. In following argumentative processes, he develops the habit of thinking logically and of measuring motives. Accordingly, when doubt exists in his mind, he can make a dispassionate examination of the " facts " involved, weigh and consider his own prejudices and his own weaknesses, and thereby learn how much of his uncertainty is well founded and how much of it is due merely to the universal will to doubt. Thus it may be seen that skill in argumentation serves one wherever research, original investigation, or experiment is to be made. The person who does pioneer service in any branch of knowledge or in any kind of transaction must not be wholly influenced by the traditions of the past, yet he must, for his own safety, have some regard for these traditions. As a result he is put in a position where he cannot wholly accept or wholly ignore the work of others save as he finds that this work will stand the scrutiny of argumentative examination. The tests that he is consequently called upon to make are sure to develop open-mindedness, patience, and habits of unprejudiced thinking.

C. The Kinds of Argument

If for convenience of study we attempt to classify argumentation according to the twofold division of writing made at

the beginning of this book, we shall notice that it lies almost wholly within the field of instrumental composition. Further study will reveal the fact, too, that formal argument includes only a very small part of all argumentative writing. The occasions when people are willing to sit down and read a full discussion of a proposition, including a carefully phrased introduction, a formidable array of argument, and a well-rounded conclusion, are comparatively few. On the other hand, there are almost countless opportunities to employ the informal argumentative paragraph, the persuasive personal letter, and the expository discussion that is partly argumentative. Yet because the underlying principles of all kinds of argument are the same, and because the less formal arguments do not involve all possible processes, while the more formal ones do, it will be profitable for us to base our study largely on the latter.

II. THE ARGUMENTATIVE PROCESS

A. Phrasing the Proposition

The first step in argumentative procedure is to know definitely what we intend to write about. This step is taken by expressing our subject in the form of a clear-cut, unambiguous proposition. In exposition, if we choose to do so, we can put our subject in one word; for example, "Peace." Now in treating "Peace" in an expository essay, we might explain the origin of the movement toward international peace, we might discuss the workings of the numerous peace societies in the world to-day, or we might show the relation existing between commercial enterprise and the positive assurance of peace. In fact, we might treat any part of the subject that promised to be interesting to ourselves or our audience. But if we treat "Peace" argumentatively, the smallest unit we can employ as a starting point in our discussion is a complete sentence. It is necessary for us to affirm or deny something about "Peace"; and we must limit ourselves to this one aspect of the subject. "Peace is desir-

able," "Peace is unattainable," "Peace is most certain when preparations for war are greatest," "An Anglo-American alliance would promote peace," "The possibility of war does not retard commercial enterprise," are some of the many forms in which the proposition might be expressed. It should be noted that every one of them provides the basis of a single, definite affirmation or denial.

But the work of preparation is only begun when the writer has decided upon a proposition that to him seems to embody the matters to be argued; he must be sure that his reader also has in mind the same proposition and accepts it as satisfactory. In thus meeting his readers or his opponents on common ground at the outset lies the first great strength of the arguer. The fruitless results of ignoring this fact may be seen in many so-called arguments by curbstone statesmen. One of them says, for example, "You ought to vote for Smith."

"You ought to vote for Jones," the other replies; "for he is the better fitted for the office."

In the discussion that ensues, they do not at any time join issue because they did not have a common starting point. After they have contended until both are weary, one of them takes a parting shot by declaring, "You dodge the issue; anybody knows that Jones is the more upright man."

"But that is not what we are talking about," the other answers; "I have been contending that Smith is a better business man."

In the form of a proposition, the starting point of the first was: "Jones is morally well qualified for office"; that of the second: "Smith has the executive ability to hold office." And in the arguments adduced, each contender has had only his own proposition in mind. Now as we make progress in the study of our subject we shall see that in all argument, whether formal or informal, the one quality which we try to gain ourselves and demand of those who oppose us is definiteness; and we must be content to seek this quality in vain unless we make our initial position not only clear but acceptable to our readers.

B. Analyzing the Proposition

1. Defining the terms. — After we have given our readers assurance that our proposition is one which reflects fairly the spirit of the question to be argued, we must satisfy them further, even though they be out of sympathy with our views, by explaining or defining all the doubtful terms in the proposition. We saw in our study of exposition how difficult it is to phrase a definition that really defines, and here in the first step in argumentation we encounter the difficulty in its most formidable aspect. What, first of all, is a good definition? When is a definition adequate?

A definition is good, we learned in the preceding chapter, when, to express the matter simply, it gives us information which enables us to discriminate between the term defined and terms which are not the term defined. Usually our first step is to name the class in which the subject of the definition is included, and the next is to point out the specific characteristics which distinguish it from other members of the same class. Furthermore, we must give the connotation of the term, and we must see to it that the definition does not include the term itself or any cognate of it. Ordinarily, too, the definition must be expressed in language more familiar to the reader than the term which designates the subject of the definition. Yet in defining the terms of a proposition, something more is demanded; the context must be taken into consideration. For example, let us look at a proposition that has been discussed frequently during the past few decades, — "Chinese immigration should be prohibited by law." This proposition appears to be simple and direct. Its terms seem to require little definition. Yet not long ago in an intercollegiate debate, when the negative side maintained that the exclusion of the Chinese should be brought about through a treaty with China, and not by a prohibition on the part of the United States, the affirmative side produced definitions of "law" which showed that the term included "treaty," quoted the Constitution in support of their definition, and

maintained that the affirmative side as well as the negative stood for exclusion by treaty. Now, it is true that treaties constitute a part of "the supreme law of the land," yet no one who reads the Article of the Constitution in which "law" is thus used can maintain in good faith that the word carries the same meaning in the proposition under discussion. The total signification of the sentence in Article VI and the total signification of the proposition make clear that "law" as applied to a treaty, which in its nature is an agreement, does not mean the same as "law" applied to a statute enacted by the legislative department of one government without the express willingness of another that may be concerned. The maker of artificial definitions of this kind disregards the fact that in bringing an audience to accept our definition of terms, we must strive not merely to make ourselves understood, but to reflect the spirit of the context of the words defined. We must use the words as they have come to be generally accepted in discussions of the question at issue. Our definition must not offend common sense.

2. **Finding the chief issues.** — When we have put our subject in the form of a proposition that will admit of clear, fair, authoritative definition, we should, as the next step, study again the material on both sides of the question, — this time in the light of the proposition we have phrased. The first advantage of this study lies in the fact that it enables us to determine what things are unessential to the proving of the proposition. This work of negative selection is, as we shall see, no less important in argumentation than in the other forms of writing. The one who argues cannot put himself on a more direct road to failure than by ignoring the demands of relevancy in choosing the points which he hopes to prove. Yet many writers and speakers allow their enthusiasm for their subject to control them so completely that they forget this fact, and spend valuable space and time in proving things that have no important bearing on the question in hand. The admirers of an experienced temperance orator still wonder why he failed to enlist sympathy for his cause when, a few years ago, he was invited to address an audience of business

men in a Western city on the commercial advantages of a "dry" town, and spent a large part of his time trying to show that the drinking of alcoholic liquor was responsible for the assassination of Lincoln, Garfield, and McKinley. The emphasis that is placed upon such irrelevant matters not only takes attention from the real questions involved, but invariably causes a reader or hearer to lose confidence in whatever reasoning the arguer may employ in treating matters that really are relevant. The waste is not, therefore, merely an omission, but a step toward positive self-destruction. If we would avoid it, we must study the material for the purpose of eliminating matter that does not bear on the proposition set for proof.

This study of both sides of the question helps us in another way to begin our argument on firm ground: it makes easily possible the frank setting forth of all matters that we are willing to grant simply for argument's sake or to admit because they have a bearing on the proposition, yet are not harmful to the opinions we hold. Every question that merits support or attack contains matter of this character, and every writer of arguments is called upon frequently, either by his own zeal to be effective or by his opponents in person, to make such admissions. Indeed, one of the marks of the skilled arguer is his willingness to grant or admit many things. Such an attitude suggests fair-mindedness and full knowledge. Yet when it is remembered that a single admission made unnecessarily may prove disastrous to one's argument, we may see at once how important it is that one know what to admit. The only reliable method to follow is that of really gaining full knowledge. In other words, if we desire to win the esteem which comes to the experienced arguer because of his frank admissions, we must emulate the patience and thoroughness which make his admissions safe.

Through these processes of exclusion and admission we come logically to the chief issues, the questions which must be settled in order to prove or disprove the proposition. Usually it is wise for the writer to enumerate these issues, — to state clearly just what he hopes to prove, — since such a course will

give the readers the framework of the argument at the beginning and thereby enable them to follow the writer easily. If, however, the desire to produce a climactic effect should seem to demand that the full statement of the issues be withheld and that they be taken up one by one in the argument itself, it is none the less important that the writer have them clearly phrased for his own guidance. If he has before him in definite language the points he must prove, he will save himself the humiliation of failing to cover the ground completely, or, on the other hand, of having the divisions of his argument overlap. Moreover, he will know for a certainty whether the climax toward which he strives is in reality a climax. Finally, he will be prepared to anticipate much of the argument that will quite certainly be engendered in the minds of unfriendly readers.

C. Proving the Proposition

1. The nature of proof. — Throughout the discussion of the preliminary steps in argument we have observed how important it is that we make it easy for our readers to see from their own point of view, or from a point of view not very different from their own, the things we desire to have them accept. We must not ask them to give up immediately and completely the fruits of a life of training and experience which has been different from ours, but instead, we must bring them to see that they ought to be receptive to a new interpretation of this training and this experience. Now, this careful regard for the attitude of our audience is even more important in the actual proving of the proposition than it is in the preliminary steps. "Proof," a much-respected writer has said, "is the sufficient reason for assenting to a proposition as true."[1] If we hope, then, to make progress in our efforts to convince others, we must study patiently the means of making it easy for them to assent. The experience of giving up their opinions must make as little trouble for them as possible.

[1] Wharton, *Criminal Evidence*, p. 3.

2. The means of proof: Evidence. — The only means of proof is what, in a term borrowed from the profession of law, is called evidence. Evidence is "any matter of fact, the effect, tendency, or design of which is to produce in the mind a persuasion affirmative or disaffirmative of the existence of some other matter of fact."[1] Thus we may see that much so-called argument, — mere assertion of belief or opinion, — is not proof at all. Children and the unlettered may be excused for spending their time in asking that their words be accepted as final; but adults, though they have attained a position in the world which would seem to entitle them to an opinion, will, unless completely ignored, be asked to offer something additional which partakes of the nature of fact.

3. Two kinds of evidence. — For convenience, evidence is usually divided into two classes, — direct and circumstantial. The first of these, direct evidence, tends to establish a fact immediately without any intervening inferences. Thus, if five students say they saw Kay, a classmate, cheating in an examination, the evidence is direct. If they really saw him making use of unfair means, the question is settled. But direct evidence is not always reliable. In the first place, the witnesses may not be truthful. Possibly these five students did not see their classmate cheat at all. It may be that he had offended them on some previous occasion and that they agreed to make a false report concerning his conduct in order to "get even." Moreover, direct evidence has its weaknesses, even if the motives of the witnesses cannot be questioned. Possibly, for example, the five students were unduly agitated over the character of the examination and thought they saw him copying from a slip of paper when, as a matter of fact, he was not doing so; or possibly they were unconsciously influenced by prejudice arising from his superior scholarship. Thus, in a number of ways, direct evidence may fail to prove. Nevertheless, when the witness appears to be truthful and intelligent, his testimony ordinarily carries conviction.

[1] Best, *On Evidence*, p. 5.

Circumstantial evidence " tends to prove a fact in issue by proving other events or circumstances which, according to the common experience of mankind, are usually or always attended by the fact in issue." [1] It is, therefore, not a kind of evidence that proves immediately, but by inference from accepted facts. Thus, nobody saw Kay cheat in an examination, but he had been openly charged by Stanton, a fair-minded student, with stealing a ring; he had not studied seriously just before the examination, and he had " loafed " throughout the earlier part of the half-year; he was, moreover, a weak student normally, and rarely made creditable grades; he had on the morning of the examination boasted that he would make an A; his examination paper revealed a surprising amount of concrete detail; and when the next day he was called before the Committee on Scholarship, he had " forgotten " some of the details that he had used skillfully in answering the examination questions. No one of these facts standing alone would justify us in saying that Kay cheated, yet the inference which, in the light of our experience, we draw from all the facts taken together, is that probably he was guilty. Still, this may be a case which represents the weakness of circumstantial evidence; we may have drawn the wrong inferences from the facts. It is possible that Kay entered Stanton's room just after a gust of wind had rolled the ring into an open register; he may have made the boast about making an A simply because he was aware that everybody knew him to be a poor student; his high grade on the examination was possibly due to the fact that the questions, as sometimes happens, called for the few concrete details he had " absorbed " in the course; and his inability to remember when questioned by the Committee the next day may have been the result of worry caused by a wholly false accusation that seemed difficult to disprove. Our experience has convinced us that there is always the possibility of more than one inference from a given set of facts.

Nevertheless, circumstantial evidence frequently serves as a test of direct evidence. Sometimes the testimony of imperfect

[1] *International Dictionary.*

human beings is entirely set at naught by the unprejudiced, unalterable circumstances attendant upon the matter at issue. Let us take an example from politics. In the autumn of 1911 it was said "on good authority" that the political unfriendliness shown by William Jennings Bryan toward Governor Harmon, of Ohio, was due to an unguarded remark made in 1908 by Governor Harmon's young daughter. This daughter, it was said, not being old enough to know when to keep dinner-table secrets, told a very intimate girl friend in Texas, who was also the friend of one of the daughters of Mr. Bryan, that "good old daddy doesn't care if Mr. Bryan is defeated, for then he'll be out of the way in 1912." Inasmuch as it was known that both Governor Harmon and Mr. Bryan had daughters, the supposed explanation found many willing believers. An investigation, however, revealed circumstances that made the story absolutely impossible. (1) Governor Harmon's daughters, all married, left home long before the campaign of 1908. (2) Not one of them ever had a girl or woman friend in Texas. (3) Not even his granddaughters could have taken part in the supposed transaction, for at that time the elder of the two was only six years old. It matters not how high the "authority" may be, it cannot maintain itself in the face of evidence of this kind.

The ideal in proof is, of course, to combine direct and circumstantial evidence. Things may not be what they seem to our senses, and there may be serious doubt about the value that should be attached to inferences we have drawn from circumstantial facts; but if the direct evidence, the testimony of persons who observed the fact at issue, is supported by inferences from a chain of circumstances, or if, on the other hand, inferences are supported by a reasonable amount of direct evidence, there usually is little doubt about the merits of the question. If, for example, to return to our first illustration, several students should testify that they saw Kay cheat in an examination, and all the attendant circumstances pointed to his guilt, it would be very difficult to explain away both the direct evidence and the inferences. Sometimes an attempt at such an explanation is

successful, yet usually when observation and inferences harmonize, very little " reasonable doubt " remains.

4. **Sources of evidence.** — If the proving of such a simple case as the one that has served us in illustrating the difference between direct and circumstantial evidence has so many possibilities, we can see at once that a proposition which involves a large number of facts, the experience of many men, and the interest of many others, could not be proved easily or simply. The variety of evidence that the proving of such a proposition demands makes it important that a student know every possible means of finding evidence and of bringing it to bear. The chief sources are personal observation, the testimony of individuals, newspaper files, magazines, government documents, reports of special commissions and committees, and books of reference. He must be able, therefore, to make first-hand observations and see their significance; he must know how to direct conversation with people who are interested in the subject; he must get the drift of opinion by reading magazine articles and other general discussions; and he must follow possible lines of argument by reading special treatises and authoritative and official documents. All these sources he must know how to use. Furthermore, he must know how to make them fruitful by classifying and organizing the material which he gets from them. He must not let himself believe that good intentions or sterling honesty or clever wit will take the place of abundant facts.

5. **Selection of evidence.** — But we cannot profitably employ all the evidence we draw from these sources. In the first place, it is not all of equal weight. Moreover, the prejudices of the audience who will read the argument, their intellectual grade, and the character of other arguments that they have read or heard or will probably read or hear, make it advisable to choose between points that in the mind of the writer may seem to be equally important. Thus we come again to one of the cardinal principles of all creative work, — selection.

We cannot, to be sure, select evidence according to rigid rule, yet it is advisable to keep in mind some principles of choice that

are well established. First of all, the evidence should give the important parts of our argument their due emphasis. Secondly, it should meet squarely any important arguments which we are certain our readers will have in mind, either through previous reading or through a mere desire to believe the other side. Thirdly, the whole body of evidence which we submit should give the impression of fairness; for, we must always remember, the purpose of argument is to make it easy for the indifferent, the doubtful, and the antagonistic to believe as we believe. Finally, the evidence should be chosen for the constructive harmony of its parts. That is to say, the individual points when brought into logical relation with one another should produce not only individual effects, but a convincing total effect. The completed argument should be more than equal to the sum of its parts.

6. Tests of evidence. — If all arguing were pure reasoning about unquestioned facts, the problem of convincing our friends would be comparatively simple. Such a happy state of affairs would make it possible for the most elementary mind to reach thoroughly satisfactory logical conclusions. Unfortunately, however, the lot of mankind has been cast in a place where such Utopian conditions do not exist. Instead of enjoying the simple pastime of performing clever logical tricks with such unprejudiced people as X, Y, and Z, we must deal with concrete men and women whose senses are imperfect, whose lives are full of inherited or acquired prejudices, and whose nearest approach to truth has been in a world where only half-truths exist. We must, then, in finding and selecting evidence, constantly guard against error by testing our own evidence and that which others have used in treating the same matters.

a. Testing the source of evidence. — At the outset we should test the source of evidence. We should know what the source of evidence is, and whether this source is generally accepted as trustworthy. If, for example, in the preparation of a paper we must base our argument on the oral or written testimony of a witness, we must know first of all whether he is reliable.

Has he had opportunity to observe the facts involved? Does he habitually observe closely? Is he known to exercise due caution in reaching conclusions? Is he ordinarily influenced much by prejudice? Is he usually willing to express his opinions freely? Does he have a reputation for truthfulness and fairness? Or, if the source of evidence is one that is generally regarded as reliable, are there any special circumstances that might render trustworthy evidence unlikely in this case? For example, if a respected man in public life declares that a certain judge is a cheap politician and a "crook," his testimony will have comparatively little weight when it becomes known that this judge at one time rendered a decision that was very distasteful to him. Or, if a food manufacturer questions the professional ability of a chemist, our confidence in his testimony will be shaken, probably, when we learn that the chemist at one time caused him to be convicted of adulterating food products. Likewise, a newspaper editor's discussion of a man's qualifications for public office will not be accepted as the final word in the matter if we learn that the candidate was formerly the proprietor of a rival paper. Experience has led us to believe that the most conservative, the most public-spirited, and the most conscientious men may be influenced in what they see and in what they think by early environment, early dogmatic teaching, and, above all, by personal interest. Of course, if a man makes admissions that are hurtful to his closest interests or contrary to his known wishes, his testimony usually may be accepted as reliable. If it is convincing at all it is overwhelmingly convincing. But such admissions are so clearly a violation of ordinary human conduct that they must be examined with the closest scrutiny before they are accepted in full faith. Ordinarily the best source of evidence is the witness who has established a reputation for intellectual honesty, who has had an opportunity to observe the facts, yet who is essentially disinterested.

b. Testing the terms of evidence. — Moreover, tests must be applied to the terms in which argument is expressed. We have noted many times in our study of the problems of writing that

language at best is a very imperfect medium. We have seen, too, in the earlier part of this chapter, how necessary it is in beginning an argument to make our readers understand words in the sense in which we use them. Now, in the entire argumentative process, there is need of similar care in examining the terms we use ourselves and those which other persons have employed in discussing the same questions. Vagueness and ambiguity do not belong inherently in some words; neither does definiteness belong in others. The manner in which a word is used makes it ambiguous or definite. Most of the familiar words in our language have two or more meanings. Our care must be to employ them in a context that will not confuse our readers, and to guard ourselves against being misled by other persons into like confusion. The popular form of this unfair use of a word is illustrated in the would-be profound statement made by a fourth-class stump speaker: "It seems surprising, fellow citizens, that it required fifty years and more for the people of this great country, supposedly living under a *republican* form of government, to see the great need of organizing the *Republican* party!" In a simple, unqualified statement, "course" or "school" may be easily misunderstood in a college or university community, since "course" can mean either a branch of study pursued for one year, or all the studies that it is necessary to complete in order to receive a degree, and a "school" may be elementary, secondary, technical, or professional. There is no absolute way of avoiding confusion in the use of terms; but the surest safety lies in a constant regard for the audience that will probably read one's argument.

c. Testing evidential inferences. — But the source of evidence and the terms in which evidence is expressed are usually less difficult to test than the inferences made from established facts. The importance of this latter test at once appears when we call to mind the many possibilities of error in making inferences. Every kind of argumentative sin demands justification or condonation if it is only committed in the name of logic. Anything is called logical that in the vaguest way conforms to

the mere mechanics of reasoning. What could be more puerile, for example, than the following nonsense expressed with sectarian warmth in a university pulpit:

> "I am not a heathen, therefore I am not a Mohammedan.
> I do not believe in Rome, therefore I am not a Catholic.
> But I am a Christian, therefore I am a Free Methodist."

From such palpable absurdities as this all the way down to error or weakness that requires the closest attention of trained intelligence, the dangers of inference range themselves. We must learn how to avoid them by studying the safe and the dangerous ways in which inferences are drawn.

Let us first consider simple induction. "Induction is the process by which we conclude that what is true of certain individuals of a class is true of the whole class, or that what is true at certain times will be true in similar circumstances at all times."[1] For example, the botanist observes in a dozen instances that a certain plant grows only in marshy ground, and infers that marshy ground is its habitat. The merchant learns that a man has refused to settle accounts at three or four stores and declares that "that man doesn't pay his bills." The chemist, without knowing how many more elements may be discovered, infers that the properties of all elements as well as the properties of all compounds are periodic functions of the atomic weights. Since it is in this way possible to make safe generalizations from careful observation or study, persons are constantly in danger of thinking that the method is always sure to produce acceptable results. Thus we hear hasty generalizations every day. "Dark green watermelons are always better than striped ones." "Trees that are trimmed on the twenty-third of April always die; I have tried it two or three times." "All shoemakers are Socialists." "The United States has the most poorly governed cities in the world." "All authors smoke." "Labor unions favor dynamiting." "All football players are short-lived." Perhaps with greater justification the college president who has

[1] John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic*, Book III, Chap. II.

observed that several good students have come from a certain preparatory school remarks: "Men who come from that school stand high in scholarship." In all of these instances, regardless of the validity of the conclusion reached, it will be noticed that the reasoning is from specific facts to a conclusion which includes more than the individual cases observed.

This method of reasoning, because of its adaptability, is open to much abuse. It is based on the assumption that things in this world can be classified, and that there is constancy, relative or absolute, in natural processes. If, therefore, it is to be of service to us, we must always test our inferences by learning whether they are based upon the examination of a convincing number of cases that are in their essentials typical of a well-defined class.

Deduction is the application of a general principle to a specific instance. It begins with a statement which has at some time been reached through the inductive process, and leads to the conclusion that what is true of the class about which the generalization is made must be true of the individuals in the class. The typical form of deductive reasoning is the syllogism. Thus we say:

All colleges teach language.
This institution is a college.
Therefore this institution teaches language.

If we have begun reasoning of this kind with a general statement based upon sound induction, and have permitted no vagueness or variation in the use of terms, there can be only one weakness or error to guard against: the introduction of new material in the conclusion. The following example is typical:

Imagination is the sure mark of the inventor.
Edison has much imagination.
Therefore he is one of the leading inventors of the age.

The great danger in the deductive method lies in its rigidity and consequent simplicity. It is not of value in most instances, because it cannot be applied. If we can bring inferences into

the iron-bound mold of a syllogism, we shall have no difficulty in gaining our point. But the concrete affairs of the world lend themselves so little to this method that when a student in the course of an argument finds himself surrounded by syllogisms, he may at once begin to examine the validity of the inductions upon which the syllogisms are based or ask himself seriously whether the proposition is a fit subject for argumentative discussion.

The simple inductive and deductive methods of reasoning are tested with less difficulty than two methods that spring from them: (1) reasoning from effect to cause and (2) reasoning from cause to effect. The study of these processes of making inferences should occupy a large part of the student's attention, since they are more fundamentally a part of argumentation than any other means of reaching conclusions.

The first of these, reasoning from effect to cause, is illustrated in scores of inferences in our daily lives. While we ride through the country we notice that the corn blades in some fields are split and broken, and remark that there has been a hailstorm in that community. Or when we get up in the morning we look out of the window and observe that it has rained during the night, since the walks and the lawns are wet. A large number of people in a town are stricken with typhoid fever and we say that the city water supply is contaminated. The same method is employed by the detective when, after scrutinizing the house in which a burglary has been committed, he says that the burglar broke into the house before or after a certain hour, that he entered at one window and departed through a certain door, that he was a small man, and that he was an experienced housebreaker. In making use of this method we must test it in at least three ways. In the first place, does the cause at which we arrive account wholly for the effect? For example, would a hailstorm produce all the effects we have noted on the corn? Would a contaminated water supply cause the prevalence of typhoid fever? Secondly, we must ask, could other causes produce the effect? That is, could not a violent windstorm

split and break the corn blades? Could not a careless dairyman who supplies many of the residents of the city with milk be responsible for the fever? And finally, we must ask, are these causes really operative in this case? Carrying out our illustrations, can we show that a violent windstorm passed over the community and produced the results on the corn which we noted? Can we show that a careless dairyman has distributed the germs of typhoid fever over the city? Sometimes when we have two or more possible causes to consider we must go one step further and show how it is probable that one of them produced the known result. According to the demands of the case, we must apply these tests before we are certain that we have arrived at the true cause.

Reasoning from cause to effect, though less definite in its results than reasoning from effect to cause, provides the means for many convincing inferences. Its strength lies in the fact that on account of the close relation of cause and effect, people ordinarily believe that the presence of a cause is a reasonably sure indication that the usual effect will follow. Thus the generally accepted belief in the efficacy of the early training of children leads us to remark that children who receive little parental attention will doubtless land in the penitentiary or come to some other bad end. The farmer observes that the weather is unusually dry for June or July, and without expressing the intermediate steps in his reasoning, announces that he must sell most of his colts at once because they will not sell well in the fall. Or it may be that a resident of our community who is well known for his sharp dealing is charged with embezzlement, and we at once declare that he is probably guilty. One danger in this form of reasoning is the possibility that some obstacle has prevented the cause from operating in the particular case under consideration. For example, when our case of embezzlement is investigated, it may be found that the accused man did not have any opportunity to come into possession of the funds in question and that our reasoning from antecedent probability was therefore fallacious. Another danger lies in

the fact that what seems to be a cause may be only a preceding or attendant circumstance. Thus, Friday causes bad luck; the slightest change in an unimportant tariff law causes prosperous times throughout the country; the profession of certain religious beliefs results in the winning of great battles on land and sea; and in at least one college, the singing of a certain unpopular hymn in chapel always results in an athletic defeat within a week. The wide prevalence of faulty reasoning of this kind, in every sort of matter, makes it important that we guard ourselves painstakingly against its allurements. We must be sure that the supposed known cause is really a cause, and that it is unobstructed in producing its normal effect.

A method of reasoning usually associated with argument from effect to cause and cause to effect is analogy. It, too, must always be tested rigidly, inasmuch as its character renders it extremely liable to misuse. It is not in itself argument, but only a method of reasoning that serves to make argument striking. Fundamentally it is a comparison; but it is a comparison of relations rather than of objects or ideas. For example, when a political speaker who was denouncing members of Congress for being away from Washington during session time cried, "How can a ship make a safe voyage when half the crew is ashore?" his chief purpose was not to compare a ship and a nation, but to suggest that members of Congress bear the same relation to our national government that sailors bear to their ship. The danger lies in the possibility that the relations compared are not essentially alike. We know from our own observation and study that very few sets of relations have real similarity. Too many of them possess the weakness that is evident in the following example: A student who favored universal peace was trying to show the economic fallacy of a larger navy. "Are we thus to go on forever appropriating more money year after year?" he asked. "If we were to meet a young lion in the jungle, would we try to feed him indefinitely to keep him from eating us, or would we try to kill him or make our escape?" By means of these questions the writer can easily

lead us to see his attitude toward the further increase of the navy, and he may delight our fancies; but are we ready to admit that his comparison is fundamentally sound? Has he arrived at the basic, essential nature of the case? Is the relation between the people of the United States and a large navy the same as the relation between a man and a hungry lion in the jungle? Unless we are content to let striking comparison lead us away from sound argument, we must always be putting the question: Is the analogy sound?

III. THE BRIEF: A SPECIAL KIND OF OUTLINE

It must be obvious that the tests we have been studying provide no means of ascertaining the total effect of the combined parts of a given argument. We must, therefore, as a preliminary to the writing of the argument itself, make some test of the organization of the evidence. The experienced writer, of course, may not find it necessary to make this test by constructing a written plan of any kind. It may be that his long practice has enabled him to display the parts mentally, and consequently to rearrange them and reproportion them without the assistance of any physical device. This, however, the beginner cannot hope to do. He must display the material so carefully that he, or a friendly critic, can see every element of strength and of weakness which it possesses. The best teachers and the best arguers unite in the belief that the most satisfactory means of making this test is through the brief, a kind of outline peculiarly adapted to argumentative writing. It differs from other outlines in that they may employ a single term to represent an idea, whereas it expresses every idea or thought in the form of a complete sentence. The reason for this possible difference becomes evident when we remember that in argumentation we always deal with a proposition, not a word. We must make specific affirmations or denials, and this we can do only in sentences. The brief differs further from the less specialized kinds of outlines in that they may vary in form,

while it may not; they may represent any kind of relation or any part of a process, or no process at all, but the brief represents only one kind of relation and always stands for a complete process. That is to say, the brief always gives in outline (1) a full explanation of the proposition to be proved, (2) the organization of the material to be employed as proof, and (3) a summarizing statement of what the evidence proves. Thus it invariably consists of an introduction, a brief proper, and a conclusion.

A. The Introduction

The first of these three, the introduction, should display all the steps in the argumentative process up to the proving of the proposition. It should, then, in the beginning show why the question to be argued is of interest at the time; it should include an adequate definition of all terms that seem to require defining; it should contain a full statement of admitted or granted matter; and it should present clearly the chief issues, — the subpropositions which it is necessary to prove in order to prove the main proposition. Thus we may see and should bear firmly in mind that the introduction is wholly expository. If we find when we put our argument into the form of a brief that we have some proof in the introduction, we should reorganize the material at once. An open attempt to prove when we are supposed to be making an unbiased explanation will usually result in prejudice against us and our cause.

In the following specimen introduction, note especially that a scheme of numerals is employed to indicate the coördination and subordination of parts, but that no word showing causal relationship is used between a coördinate and subordinate part. Although the use or omission of such a word as " for " or " because " may seem to be a matter that belongs to the mere mechanics of writing, the student will find that if he uses one of these words in the introduction, he will unconsciously drop into the method of proof when he should be employing the method of explanation.

Admission to the Freshman Class in American Colleges should be by Examination

Introduction

I. The method of admission to American colleges is a matter of new national interest to-day, in that
   - *A.* The prevailing system of admission by certificate has created much dissatisfaction in college circles.
   - *B.* The system of admission by examination is being attacked by some of the secondary schools.

II. The question is restricted by the following definition of terms:
   - *A.* A college as herein treated is an institution of higher learning which provides primarily courses of study leading to the degree of Bachelor of Arts or similar non-professional degree.
   - *B.* The freshman class is the first of the four regular college classes.

III. The discussion can be further limited, in that
   - *A.* The affirmative admits that entrance examinations have been subjected to some just criticism.
   - *B.* The affirmative does not propose a system of examinations that shall be in writing exclusively.

IV. Those who favor the system of admission by examination hold the following views:
   - *A.* The certificate system is unsatisfactory.
   - *B.* The examination benefits the secondary school.
   - *C.* It benefits the student entering college.
   - *D.* It benefits the college as an institution.

V. Those who believe that admission should not be by examination hold these clearly opposite views:
   - *A.* The examination system is not beneficial to school or college.
   - *B.* On the contrary, it tends to make our high schools into mere fitting schools.
   - *C.* The certificate system, where it has been tried, has proved satisfactory.

VI. From these conflicting opinions it appears that the following points must be determined:
   - *A.* Is the certificate system satisfactory?
   - *B.* Does the examination system benefit or injure the secondary school?
   - *C.* Does it benefit the student entering college?
   - *D.* Does it benefit the college as an institution?

B. The Brief Proper

The brief proper should display in logical order the evidence with which the writer seeks to establish his position. It should be expressed in specific terms, and should not omit anything "contributory to proof" that the writer expects to present in the completed argument. This fact should be borne constantly in mind, since many students think they have made a brief when in fact they have only expressed a vague notion of what might be done if intellectual energy were applied. If it should seem wise not only to offer direct, positive argument, but also to defend one's position against arguments which have been made by others, or might, perchance, be made by one's readers, this refutation should be incorporated in the brief proper. Its position should be determined by the demands of coherence and emphasis.

In the specimen brief proper which follows, note first that each main statement corresponds to one of the chief issues set forth in the introduction. Note also that the order followed is first the statement to be proved, then the evidence supporting the statement. The logical relation between a main contention and a subordinate one supporting it is expressed by "for" or "because." Of course, it would be possible to reverse the order and present the proof before the statement which it is to prove, expressing the relation between the main and subordinate part by the use of "therefore"; but this arrangement is such a clear case of "putting the cart before the horse" that it cannot be regarded as a usable test. We like, ordinarily, to know what a person is trying to prove before he submits evidence. Note further that each symbol stands for a complete statement, and that the order of the symbols does not vary:

I. - - - - - - -
A. - - - - - - -
1. - - - - - - -
a. - - - - - - -
(1) - - - - - - -
(*a*) - - - - - - -

BRIEF PROPER

Admission to the freshman class in American colleges should be by examination, for

I. The certificate system is not satisfactory, for
  A. The certificate is not sufficient proof that the applicant has done the work which it supposedly represents, for
    1. The applicant may have received passing marks because of favoritism.
    2. He may have slipped through without getting the work thoroughly enough to result in lasting benefit.
  B. Colleges must determine for themselves who is qualified to enter, for
    1. It is they that are held responsible for the kind of product they give to the world.
  C. High schools vary in efficiency, for
    1. Some are hampered by lack of equipment.
    2. Some, because of local conditions, maintain a much lower standard than others.

II. The examination system benefits the secondary school, for
  A. It raises the standard of scholarship, for
    1. The school will prepare its students more thoroughly, for
      a. It will desire the students to be sufficiently prepared to pass any college entrance examination.
  B. It benefits the individual who expects to go to college, for
    1. He will study more conscientiously, for
      a. He will wish to be prepared to pass any college entrance examination.
    2. It provides a definite, stimulating ideal for him.

III. The contention that the examination system would make mere fitting schools of our high schools is unfounded, for
  A. The examination system would require no special preparatory course in high school, for
    1. The examination could be given on subjects taught in good high schools all over the country.
    2. It might be made to cover the subjects which would ordinarily be taught, regardless of their special value as preparation for college.
  B. Many of our best high schools at the present time offer optional courses for those who do not expect to attend college.

IV. The examination benefits the student upon his entrance to college, for
  A. He is given an equal opportunity with other students, regardless of the high school which he attended, for

1. The examination constitutes an unvarying requirement for all applicants.

B. He is not handicapped by classmates with meager preparation, for

1. The examination demands some degree of available knowledge and skill.

C. He has been enabled to find his weak spots.

D. He gains more confidence in himself.

V. The examination system benefits the college as an institution, for

A. The standard of scholarship is raised, for

1. A better class of students is obtained, for

a. The examination tends to exclude those insufficiently prepared, for

(1) Many weak students, who could be admitted by the certificate plan, do not try to pass the examinations.

(2) Many others fail.

B. The professors are enabled to do more effective work, for

1. They have some notion of the ability of the students.
2. The students are more or less uniform in their ability, for

a. They do not fall below a fixed standard.

C. Institutions now employing the examination system, though some of them propose modifications, stand firmly in favor of the system in its essentials, for

1. Harvard favors it.
2. Yale favors it.
3. Columbia favors it.
4. Princeton favors it.

C. The Conclusion

The purpose of the conclusion is to summarize and intensify the brief proper. The conclusion is a reminder that the statements set for proof have really been proved. It should always be specific. Consequently, to close a brief with such an indefinite expression as, —

"I. Summary of points proved."

bespeaks either inadequate knowledge or laziness, — two things alike fatal in an argument. Note how the following specimen conclusion brings together the main points of the preceding brief proper.

CONCLUSION

Admission to the freshman class in American colleges should be by examination, for

I. The certificate system is unsatisfactory.
II. The examination system benefits the secondary school.
III. It does not change the school's purpose by making it a mere fitting school.
IV. It benefits the student upon his entrance to college.
V. It benefits the college as an institution.

D. The Parts Brought Together

Now that we have considered the three parts of the brief separately, let us view them as they stand together. Note that the entire brief represents one complete process: the introduction states the case, the brief proper proves the case stated in the introduction, and the conclusion brings together the points that were stated in the introduction and proved in the brief proper. A study of the completed brief ought to enable the writer to modify any part of the process before he applies himself to the work of writing out the full argument. It is always much easier to change the framework than the perfected structure.

Admission to the Freshman Class in American Colleges Should be by Examination

INTRODUCTION

I. The method of admission to American colleges is a matter of new national interest to-day, in that
   A. The prevailing system of admission by certificate has created much dissatisfaction in college circles.
   B. The system of admission by examination is being attacked by some of the secondary schools.
II. The question is restricted by the following definition of terms:
   A. A college as herein treated is an institution of higher learning which provides primarily courses of study leading to the degree of Bachelor of Arts or similar non-professional degree.
   B. The freshman class is the first of the four regular college classes.
III. The discussion can be further limited, in that

A. The affirmative admits that entrance examinations have been subjected to some just criticism.

B. The affirmative does not propose a system of examinations that shall be in writing exclusively.

IV. Those who favor the system of admission by examination hold the following views:

A. The certificate system is unsatisfactory.

B. The examination benefits the secondary school.

C. It benefits the student entering college.

D. It benefits the college as an institution.

V. Those who believe that admission should not be by examination hold these clearly opposite views:

A. The examination system is not beneficial to school or college.

B. On the contrary, it tends to make our high schools into mere fitting schools.

C. The certificate system, where it has been tried, has proved satisfactory.

VI. From these conflicting opinions it appears that the following points must be determined:

A. Is the certificate system satisfactory?

B. Does the examination system benefit or injure the secondary school?

C. Does it benefit the student entering college?

D. Does it benefit the college as an institution?

BRIEF PROPER

Admission to the freshman class in American colleges should be by examination, for

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2. Some, because of local conditions, maintain a much lower standard than others.

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    1. He will study more conscientiously, for
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    2. It provides a definite, stimulating ideal for him.

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  A. The examination system would require no special preparatory course in high school, for
    1. The examination could be given on subjects taught in good high schools all over the country.
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IV. The examination benefits the student upon his entrance to college, for
  A. He is given an equal opportunity with other students, regardless of the high school which he attended, for
    1. The examination constitutes an unvarying requirement for all applicants.
  B. He is not handicapped by classmates with meager preparation, for
    1. The examination demands some degree of available knowledge and skill.
  C. He has been enabled to find his weak spots.
  D. He gains more confidence in himself.

V. The examination system benefits the college as an institution, for
  A. The standard of scholarship is raised, for
    1. A better class of students is obtained, for
      a. The examination tends to exclude those insufficiently prepared, for
        (1) Many weak students, who would be admitted by the certificate plan, do not try to pass the examinations.
        (2) Many others fail.
  B. The professors are enabled to do more effective work, for
    1. They have some notion of the ability of the students.

2. The students are more or less uniform in their ability, for
   a. They do not fall below a fixed standard.

C. Institutions now employing the examination system, though some of them propose modifications, stand firmly in favor of the system in its essentials, for
   1. Harvard favors it.
   2. Yale favors it.
   3. Columbia favors it.
   4. Princeton favors it.

CONCLUSION

Admission to the freshman class in American colleges should be by examination, for

I. The certificate system is unsatisfactory.
II. The examination system benefits the secondary school.
III. It does not change the school's purpose by making it a mere fitting school.
IV. It benefits the student upon his entrance to college.
V. It benefits the college as an institution.

IV. THE COMPLETED ARGUMENT

A. The Completed Argument and the Brief

When the student comes to the writing of the argument itself from the brief he has constructed, the one problem that causes him sore distress is that of retaining form and sequence without making the paragraphs bony and lifeless. In Chapter V we saw how much skill the writer of any kind of composition must have in order to give flesh and blood to a mere literary skeleton. Undoubtedly no other form affords so much trouble in this respect as does argumentation. If an argument is to be convincing, it must have close logical structure. This structure is easily expressed in the brief. Since the brief is written in complete sentences, and since the sentences are connected by "for" or "because," it requires little effort to rewrite the brief in the form of paragraphs and call the result a completed argument. But it is, of course, no such thing. It possesses only plan, organization. It has not been vivified to

meet the demands of the writer's audience. Consequently, it falls short of being real communication between writer and reader.

B. The Completed Argument and the Audience

The completed argument must be adapted to the audience to whom it is addressed, first by skillful approach. We have seen that the plan of the introduction is in itself designed to overcome prejudice. An even greater factor, however, in determining whether the argument proper will receive a fair hearing is the manner in which these introductory explanations are offered. If people were merely indifferent, a clear explanation might quicken them to a willingness to be convinced; but in many cases they are not only indifferent, but hostile. We must, then, perform the double task of lulling their hostility and arousing their sympathy. To do this, it is necessary to avoid antagonizing any opinions which they hold firmly, and at the same time to direct their attention to opinions which would not ordinarily receive their thoughtful consideration. Such a task, it must be evident, involves more than the presentation of the bald preliminary facts. Above all else, the introduction must be tactful. As an example, let us look at a paragraph of the introduction written from the brief we have studied.

BRIEF — INTRODUCTION	COMPLETED ARGUMENT — INTRODUCTION
I. The method of admission to American colleges is a matter of new national interest to-day, in that *A*. The prevailing system of admission by certificate has created much dissatisfaction in college circles.	During the past four or five years the method of admitting students to American colleges has aroused vigorous and sometimes bitter discussion among educators all over the country. The colleges assert that the class of students they receive under the prevailing system of admission by high school certificate is very poor, and they attach much of the blame to the certificate system. The high schools,

B. The system of admission by examination is being attacked by some of the secondary schools.

on the other hand, believe that the colleges are unwarrantably setting themselves up as judges of the efficiency of secondary education, and favor resisting any further "domination" of this kind. The question, then, is one of vital importance, inasmuch as neither the high school nor the college can attain the highest degree of efficiency until each is working in coördination and harmony with the other. The system of admission to college which will best bring about this harmony is the system that we want in America to-day.

In the body of the argument, adaptation must take on the character not only of attitude, but of emphasis as well. Exposition represents things in their true proportion, but argumentation emphasizes the things about which there is the greatest demand for unanimity of opinion or action. It dwells upon some parts, emphasizing them through different views or approaches until they stand quite out of their real proportion, in order that the reader may think about them fully enough to overcome his prejudice or indifference. We cannot, of course, have an example of emphasis by proportion in one isolated paragraph, but we can see how the mere framework of a point in an argument may be developed.

BRIEF PROPER

Admission to the freshman class in American colleges should be by examination, for

I. The certificate system is not satisfactory, for

BODY OF THE ARGUMENT

The first reason why admission to American colleges should be by examination is that the alternative plan, the certificate system, is unsatisfactory. As conditions exist now in most parts of the country, the college must take for granted that the applicant is amply fitted for admission, simply because he

A. The certificate is not sufficient proof that the applicant has done the work which it supposedly represents, for

1. The applicant may have received passing marks because of favoritism.

2. He may have slipped through without getting the work thoroughly enough to result in lasting benefit.

has a high school diploma and a certificate stating that he has a certain number of credits in each study. This is asking too much of the college. Such an attitude does not take into consideration how the student may have got through high school, or how poorly he may have done his work. Every year some of the students who fall behind in college and are "dropped," confess that they did not learn how to work while in high school because for some reason they were specially favored by their teachers, or because their parents used their official or social influence to have them passed. Furthermore, there are always many pupils who barely succeed in passing, but who, once they have passed, are graduates of the school. Now students of both these classes scarcely deserve to be graduated from any high school, much less to enter college upon a par with other students who have done faithful, conscientious work. Yet under the certificate system such a state of affairs is fostered. To permit it to continue is manifestly unfair to the college, the high school, and the improperly prepared student who thinks for the time that he profits by it, and is degrading to the good student who would have no trouble in gaining admission under any system of examinations. Surely in this respect reform is needed.[1]

Even the conclusion affords opportunity for adaptation. Its chief purpose, it is true, is to round off the argument: it should

[1] The references cited as sources of evidence are purposely omitted by the authors.

summarize; it should refer only to points that have been established in the body of the argument; and it should reaffirm the proposition set for proof, in order that the reader may see unmistakably that the argument supports the proposition. Yet the writer may so completely permeate this purely intellectual purpose of the conclusion with the spirit of some great emotion or some great interest which touches the audience closely, that the conclusion will become an appeal as well as a summary.

Study the character of the conclusion printed below. Note that it not only summarizes the argument, but relates it to the conditions in the educational world which were set forth in the introduction.

CONCLUSION

Admission to the freshman class in American colleges should be by examination, for

I. The certificate system is unsatisfactory.

II. The examination system benefits the secondary school.

III. It does not change the school's purpose by making it a mere fitting school.

IV. It benefits the student upon his entrance to college.

V. It benefits the college as an institution.

DEVELOPED CONCLUSION

In solving this vexatious question, then, the way seems clear. We cannot rely upon the certificate system, because it is insufficient as proof of fitness, it disregards largely the responsibility of the college, and it provides no line of demarcation between high schools that are good and those that are relatively poor. On the other hand, the examination system benefits the secondary school by leaving it free to adapt its course to local needs without rendering itself inadequate as a preparatory school for the few who desire to go to college. Furthermore, this system benefits the individual student by providing him with a definite ideal before he enters college, and later by relieving him of the handicap of working with students who are insufficiently prepared. Finally, it benefits the college as an institution by enabling the professors to maintain a higher standard of scholarship. Thus it is not diffi-

cult to see that this system goes further than any other toward satisfying the demands of both classes of institutions concerned. It would reduce the present unrest and misunderstanding by establishing a free coördination and a dignified harmony between the high school and the college.

V. EFFECTIVENESS IN ARGUMENTATION

A. In Formal Argument

Before we leave our subject, we should fix firmly in mind a few qualities which effective argument must possess. In the first place, let us remember that the characteristic quality of formal argument is strength. Clearness, the characteristic quality of exposition, grows out of intelligent knowledge; but strength grows out of intelligent earnestness. Strength is revealed especially in the firmness with which a writer lays hold of and treats evidence. He plans his argument so thoroughly and selects such an abundance of material that the structure which he erects does not need the feeble buttressing of his own personal opinion. Consequently, he does not have his pages covered with "It seems to me," "I think," and "I certainly believe." The hesitancy which such expressions display never will win thinking men and women away from opinions that have gained possession of their minds through training, long association, or independent reasoning. The impression of strength is deepened, too, if the writer constantly shows that the argument and the materials employed in the argument are vitally related to the rest of the world; that they are not isolated, not things apart, but are significant because on every hand they touch the life in which the reader is interested. No opportunity to use fresh statistics or concrete examples should be overlooked. Strength is gained also if the writer produces an impression of completeness. How difficult it is to do this

we may readily see if we call to mind the fact that in most cases it is not possible to treat all the points involved in an argument; that in order to have an opportunity to drive home some of them, others which the reader may possibly think important must be ignored. This condition, natural in argument, creates the danger of leaving the impression that too much remains unsaid; that the argument is full of gaps which the writer left simply because he had not evidence with which to fill them. Such an impression may be avoided and an equally definite one of completeness may be gained by giving conscious attention to the making of transitions between the parts that do receive treatment. If the reader swings along smoothly, he will not only catch the full force of all the argument, but will find no reason for questioning the writer's motive in determining which points should be emphasized.

B. In Informal Argument

In less formal arguments, — and these, we have already observed, constitute by far the larger part of all argumentative writing, — we must measure our work by other standards of effectiveness. In newspaper editorials, in essays and addresses that are argumentative only in part, in the less formal magazine articles, and in persuasive business letters, convincingness must be secured by methods often quite different from those employed in the formal forensic. It will profit us to study two or three of the differences.

In the first place, the mechanical structure of these arguments is usually less rigid. Inasmuch as they ordinarily treat matters with which the reader is already somewhat familiar, there is likely to be no formally stated proposition. For the same reason, very little preliminary definition or explanation is necessary. Furthermore, it is usually unnecessary to make a long, detailed analysis of the question in order to arrive at the issues; and the issues themselves need not be presented in formidable military array. Possibly the argument is to be only a paragraph

long, or if it is to be longer, perhaps the writer wishes to deal with only one point to the exclusion of all others. In either case he must come without delay to the matter to be argued. And the argument itself must not sacrifice the reader's time with carefully guarded approaches and deeply laid plans of defense. Instead, it must merely suggest to him that among opinions on the subject discussed, here is one that he must give fair consideration because common sense demands it. He is not obliged to make immediate reorganization of all his views on the subject, but only to give this opinion a place. The purpose of such arguments demands always that there be a minimum of machinery.

Frequently, too, the treatment of the material is different. Since arguments of this kind must win the attention of busy men and women who have not set aside a period of time for the detailed consideration of the subject as they would do in reading a long argument or in listening to a debate, the material must be not only sound but attractive. It must easily catch and keep the attention of the readers. Consequently, much illustration is desirable. Moreover, if the writer finds it necessary to employ statistics, he must simplify and clarify their presentation so that they will not leave the impression of technical study which long tables and figures usually produce. It should be observed, too, that arguments of this kind may not appear in the garb of formal reasoning at all. They may be exposition with only occasional persuasive touches, or they may be expressed in the form of narration, the incidents in the narrative serving to present the argument concretely. To be sure, it is usually impossible in this informal treatment of material to produce the impression of completeness that we have found desirable in more formal argument. The writer can, however, inspire confidence by creating an impression of grasp and breadth of view. If he possesses full knowledge and exercises skill in treating a narrow field, he can lead his readers to believe that if he but had an opportunity to deal with the subject exhaustively, all that he should say would be just as good as the sample he has given.

The informal arguments of everyday life are different from the well-rounded, elevated "pure argument" in one other respect: the writer's attitude toward his audience is more familiar. It is true that anyone who hopes to write any kind of argument successfully must not stand aloof from his audience; but in many kinds of informal argument, only the writer who works his way into the most immediate interests and sympathies of those who read can really make progress in changing opinion. In many persuasive letters this familiar tone is merely the expression of full personal knowledge of the one to whom the letter is addressed. In the editorial it may assume the attitude of leadership. The editor believes that his position and his experience entitle him to speak frankly and without overjudicious qualification or reservation. He believes further that the reputation he or his paper has for sound reasoning will help his readers to look at matters as he sees them, even though his argument appear bit by bit during a week, a month, or a year. Because the writer assumes this attitude of close acquaintance, he takes many liberties that would be dangerous in a formal, exhaustive treatment. He may, for instance, appear not to hold himself too seriously at times; or he may depart from trip-hammer argument and risk a touch of irony or pathos, or resort to abundant humor. Like the writer of formal arguments, his purpose is to convince; but instead of convincing by one overwhelming stream of evidence, he convinces by offering to direct his reader here, to make a friendly suggestion there, or to point out the absurdity or impossibility of a plan proposed by some one else. In other words, he argues in the spirit of a personal guide, a personal friend, or a friendly critic.

Study the following specimens of effective informal argument:

(1) [NO TITLE]

"Free Trade Helping our Island Traffic" is a newspaper headline over the encouraging report of the chief of the Bureau of Insular Affairs. Of course, it helps traffic; that is the purpose of free trade, precisely as it is the purpose of protection to keep down traffic between nations. Here we

have another conspicuous example of the benefit of freer commerce and incidentally convincing evidence of the damage done by false ideas as to nationalities. A few years ago, in Spanish days, anyone who suggested the removal of tariff barriers against Philippine products would have been decried as an enemy of American labor. He would have been asked whether he wished Philippine pauper-labor to take the bread out of the mouths of American workingmen, with their high standards of living. Now, with an approach to free trade, the only persons complaining are the Trusts that profited by the tariff. If we could conceive of the United States annexing France or Brazil, the tariffs against those countries would come off precisely as have those against Porto Rico and the Philippines, and as the duties upon Cuban products ought to disappear, as one contribution to a decreased cost of living. We have but to consider the world as a group of federated States to see that the folly of tariffs between them is as great as the absurdity of tariffs between California and Maine.[1]

(2) THE FOLLY OF THE RECALL

It is to be expected that a progressive community, like a progressive individual, will try some foolish experiments. We learn wisdom by our mistakes. But a community ought not to re-try an experiment the folly of which has been demonstrated by the experience of the past, and, as Senators Borah and Root in their speeches before the Senate last week showed very clearly, the experiment of making judges dependent on the will of the power which creates them was proved foolish by England's experiment in that direction. One of the causes which brought on the English Revolution was the intolerable injustice perpetrated by the judges. Because they were subject to recall by the King, they became simply instruments of kingly power. Make the judges subject to recall by the majority, and they will become equally the supple instruments of the power of majorities. The well-known warning words of de Tocqueville may be profitably recalled by the people of Arizona: "For myself, when I feel the hand of power lie heavy on my brow, I care but little to know who oppresses me; and I am not the more disposed to pass beneath the yoke because it is held out to me by the arms of a million of men." After the Revolution had overthrown the Stuart dynasty, and as a result of that Revolution, under the Act of Settlement the judges were appointed to hold office during good behavior, "and their salary ascertained and established." The result of this beneficent reform Senator Borah puts briefly and forcibly in the following sentences:

"Thereafter, instead of Jeffreys denouncing and cursing from the bench the aged Baxter; instead of Dudley taunting and tormenting the New England colonists; instead of Scroggs and Saunders, subtle and dexterous in-

[1] *The Nation*, December 29, 1910 (Vol. 91, p. 620).

struments of tyranny, we have Somers and Holt and York and Hardwick and Eldon and Mansfield laying deep and firm the great principles of English law and English justice, principles which still shield and guard the personal rights of every member of the English-speaking race, principles which our fathers were careful to bring here, principles which every American citizen would unhesitatingly shoulder his musket to defend and preserve."

Judges, whether appointed or elected, should have terms sufficiently long to make them independent of popular prejudice and popular clamor. Provision, like that of New York State, that a judge may be removed by legislative action on charges, but without impeachment, may be legitimate. The power is rarely exercised, and has, we believe, inflicted no injustice. But this is very different from a provision that, on a petition signed by one fourth of the persons who voted at the last election in a judicial district, the question of a judge's retention in office shall be submitted to a popular election.[1]

As a parting word, let it be said once more that broad sympathy, self-effacement, and fair-mindedness, — qualities desirable alike in formal and informal argument, — determine very largely whether evidence is to receive profitable consideration. This final word is offered because we are ever in danger of forgetting the real nature and the real purpose of argument. We let the spirit of warfare, the desire to overcome, outweigh the spirit of modesty and fairness. Of course, men who are seeking light will find it, even if the process involves pushing through an unfair writer's argument; they will ignore his desire to set himself above his subject; and they will try to disregard the spirit of condescension with which he addresses them. But men who go to the trouble of seeking light will find it whether or not the arguer presents his cause. Our purpose, let us never forget, is not to win the esteem of our friends or those who are already favorable to what we believe, but to change indifference or doubt or even antagonism into assent; to make it easy for others, though they be hostile, to come over to our way of thinking. The petty pleasure of showing ourselves off is despicable enough at any time, but when we parade ourselves before one who might be brought to see the truth were we only out of the way, our sin is unpardonable. Let evidence, skillfully treated,

[1] *The Outlook*, August 19, 1911 (Vol. 98, p. 852).

have its own full effect. The most substantial rewards will come to us only when we subordinate ourselves to our cause by standing aside and modestly pointing out the course that will lead to an approximation of truth.

READINGS AND EXERCISES

1. Bring to class a newspaper editorial that produces the effect of argument because it is carefully made exposition.

2. Find argument in the stories you have read during the past year. Who argues, the author or the characters in the story?

3. Have you good reason to believe as you do about the following?

a. The recall of judges.
b. Intercollegiate athletics.
c. Coeducation.
d. Woman suffrage.
e. Labor unions.

4. Can you recall a sound argumentative article that did not sooner or later modify your views on the matter discussed?

5. If you chance to be in a grocery store when a traveling salesman is trying to take an order, notice the persuasive skill which he employs.

6. Do you read argumentative articles when you find that the author takes a view different from yours? Why?

7. How much of the so-called argument that you hear on the street, at the boarding house, or on the campus is really argument?

8. Could you define to the satisfaction of a hostile audience of readers the terms *progressive, liberal arts, initiative and referendum, student democracy, feminine,* and *the interests?*

9. In which college study do you most frequently employ simple induction? reasoning from cause to effect?

10. Test the reasoning in the following paragraphs:

a. A man can always afford to give his money to a good cause. Just as exercise increases his ability to do more work, so giving increases his ability to give still more.

b. I do not have much faith in the Christian religion. Seven years ago I joined the church, and within a month I fell off the barn and broke my arm; three years afterwards I joined again and in two months my wife had

typhoid fever; last year I tried joining once more, and this time my father, who had never been sick a day in the seventy years of his life, took sick and died.

c. $100.00 — REWARD — $100.00
Will be given to the person who finds a case of rheumatism that we cannot cure.
Mr. Sick Man, isn't this offer enough to convince you that our remedy will cure *your* rheumatism?

d. My grandmother would say, for example: "Whatever sin is committed against an infinite being is an infinite evil. Every infinite evil deserves infinite punishment; therefore every sin of man deserves an infinite punishment." My Uncle Bill, on the other side, would say: "No act of a finite being can be infinite. Man is a finite being; therefore no sin of man can be infinite. No finite evil deserves infinite punishment. Man's sins are finite evils; therefore man's sins do not deserve infinite punishment." When the combatants had got thus far, they generally looked at each other in silence.
— H. B. Stowe, *Old Town Folks*. Houghton Mifflin Company.

11. Examine Ruskin's argument in favor of war in *A Crown of Wild Olive*. Is his reasoning sound?

12. Make a brief of some argument that has just appeared in a magazine or newspaper. Will the argument stand this test for organization?

13. Are the following points well arranged? Why?
I. The recall of judges would create a spirit of confidence among the people, for
A. The opportunity to test decisions would
1. Make partisan decisions risky.
2. Disarm criticism.

14. Note that the "for" must always express causal relation. The following use of the word is wrong:
A. The land surrounding the city is owned by private citizens who do not permit trespassing, for
1. The vegetation would be injured.
2. The fences and other improvements would be damaged.

15. Why is this double marking faulty?
I. *A*. The proposed remedy would not be adequate.
B. Other remedies are more completely satisfactory.

16. Read Stevenson's *Father Damien*. Why is it effective persuasion?

17. Study the magazines for a month or two in order to learn what type of argumentative article each publishes. For example, how do the arguments published in the *Atlantic Monthly* differ from those in *McClure's Magazine?*

18. Read the opinion of Chief Justice Marshall in the case of Gibbons *vs.* Ogden. It is an exceptionally good argument of its kind. It is printed in *Wheaton's Reports*, IX, p. 1, and Professor Baldwin's *College Manual of Rhetoric*, p. 402.

19. You will find a significant article on *Teaching Argumentation* in the *Nation* for May 9, 1912 (Vol. 94, p. 456). It not only deals with the subject interestingly, but is itself a good specimen of the less formal kind of argument.

20. Write a petition to your college faculty asking for the privilege of changing your course of study. Give your reasons clearly and briefly.

21. Do you know how to write a letter of application for a business position? Can you write letters that will make prospective employers want to have a personal interview with you?

22. Apply the following tests to your completed argument:

INTRODUCTION

a. Is the introduction well designed to arouse interest? Is it likely to create antagonism?

b. Are the definitions clear? Do they represent a fair view of the question? Are any terms that ought to be defined left undefined?

c. Are the issues clearly stated? Do they overlap? Do they include everything essential in reaching a conclusion concerning the proposition? Do they exclude all irrelevant matter? Have you studied very carefully the arguments which tend to prove the other side of the question?

ARGUMENT PROPER

a. Does every one of your points support unmistakably the proposition set for proof?

b. Are the main points presented in the best possible order?

c. Are your points really supported by convincing evidence? Have you led your reader to see clearly the force of this evidence?

d. Do you overestimate the importance of any of your arguments? Do you underestimate the mental opposition that you must overcome? Do you ignore any arguments that are likely to be in the minds of your readers?

e. Have you avoided error in all the inferences you have drawn?

f. Does the skeleton of the argument show through unnecessarily?

g. Are the transitions from point to point skillful?

h. Is the language of the argument forceful?

i. Is the argument interesting enough to hold the readers' attention? Is it vivified with concrete examples?

j. Is the proportion of the argument good? What ought to determine proportion in an argument?

k. Have you proved what you set out to prove?

CONCLUSION

a. Does the conclusion suffer because it contains matter not included in the argument?

b. Is the summary complete? Does it show that the argument is a unit?

c. Does the conclusion make a definite appeal?

CHAPTER IX — DESCRIPTION

I. THE FIELD OF DESCRIPTION

A. The Nature of Description

Perhaps no other terms connected with composition are so loosely used as "describe" and "description." It is common to hear one person ask another to describe how a thing is done, when he really wants some general process explained; it is still more common to hear some one request a description of what happened, when a mere recounting of events is desired. In fact, the word "describe" is often used carelessly to mean no more than "give an account of" or "tell about," a meaning which is plainly too inclusive and too vague to permit any discrimination between the explanation of something general and the picturing of something particular, between the transcript of mental images and the recording of occurrences.

Even when carefully restricted in accordance with rhetorical usage, description shows a wide and somewhat baffling variety. A description may be less than a line long or it may fill many pages. It may reproduce still life, or it may show objects in motion. It may record how things look to the eye, or it may go beyond color and form and record sensations of sound, taste, smell, and touch. It may be done with all possible exactness to serve as a means of identification, or it may be intended simply to suggest a passing impression. On the one hand is the scientist's matter-of-fact memorandum, and on the other the poet's rapturous picture. And yet in it all there is one common purpose: to reproduce mental images of things sensed. Unlike exposition, description deals with particular objects or scenes, and appeals largely to the imagination; unlike narration, it is concerned with recording sense impressions rather than with recounting events.

B. The Relation of Description to other forms of Composition

Although description holds a large place in the world's writing, it rarely exists independently. It is a significant fact that no important literary forms are distinctly descriptive. Occasionally, to be sure, we come upon a vignette or a pastel in prose; but these can scarcely be called well-developed forms. Then, too, there is the sketch; but it ordinarily contains quite as much narration as description. Certainly we have no descriptive forms comparable, let us say, with such narrative forms as the novel, the romance, the tale, the short story, the drama, or the news story. Nor is the reason hard to find. Ordinarily the isolated description cannot justify itself. Stevenson's oft-quoted remark that no human being ever spoke of scenery for more than two minutes at a time is essentially true. It is not natural to describe a person or a place unless some occasion demands it; and the occasion comes almost inevitably in connection with some narrative or some explanation. Consequently, description seldom stands by itself. But, as we all know, it is very useful in helping the reader to visualize the particular things treated in some other kind of writing. In a previous chapter we have noted the value which description may have in making exposition effective, and in the next chapter we shall see that a narrative with no description of the place where the events occur and the manner in which the characters act would be altogether bare. Indeed it is fair to say that description, although it seldom appears independently, is indispensable in making the other forms of composition vivid and real.

C. The Kinds of Description

Through all description there is traceable the line which separates instrumental writing from æsthetic. Some description serves the definitely useful end of giving information; some does no more than give imaginative pleasure. In those

descriptive pieces where the attempt is to present a clear, distinct image that will serve to identify the object described, the method employed is that of careful delineation. By enumerating a comparatively full number of details the writer appeals almost as much to his reader's understanding as to his imagination. He writes with little or no feeling. On the other hand, where the attempt is to give only one's general impression of some object or scene, or to convey a mood which some object or scene induces, the method is that of rapid suggestion. By choosing a few details which are especially characteristic, the writer can call up in the imagination of his reader a vivid image and one which at the same time reflects his own state of feeling. The distinction is clear if we contrast such a description of a daffodil as a botanist would write with a poet's picture of this same flower. The one sets down numerous details of color, form, odor, and habits of growth; the other chooses a few details which especially appeal to him personally. When Shakespeare writes

> "daffodils
> That come before the swallow dares and take
> The winds of March with beauty,"

or when Wordsworth speaks of the

> "golden daffodils,
> Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
> Fluttering and dancing in the breeze,"

we hardly get information that will lead to the sure identification of the flower, but we do get a vivid impression of how it stirred a poet's sense of the beautiful. Perhaps the essential distinction between the two kinds of description is all contained in the penetrating remark of Henri Frédéric Amiel: "Look twice to see accurately. Look only once to see beautifully."

It is not to be supposed, however, that all description conforms strictly to one or the other of these types. If we except such bare work as appears in auction notices or guidebooks, few descriptive pieces are entirely without warmth and suggestive-

ness. The description of the scientist, when at its best, gives some imaginative pleasure as well as accurate information. Similarly the most effective description of the artist will combine distinctness with beauty. Good descriptive writers mingle the two methods with all freedom; and their work is essentially instrumental or æsthetic according to the purpose or method which predominates.

II. THE DESCRIPTIVE PROCESS

A. The Point of View

1. Time and place. — With this brief survey of the field, we are now ready to study the fundamental process which is common to all description. The first step in this process is the fixing of a point of view. Of course a writer does not always do this consciously and literally. He may take an actual stand somewhere, as does the photographer when he sets up his camera at a given distance from a monument or a waterfall. He may introduce a distinct time element, as in a Sunday morning sketch or a record of April odors. Or he may specify no particular place and time, when these can be taken for granted. But in any case, if he hopes to preserve unity at all, he must regard his material steadily in one way, so far as position and time are concerned. If he is to describe a scene on some college campus, he must know whether he is doing it at midday or at twilight, in May or in December, and whether he is showing the campus as viewed from the main entrance, from a window in one of the college buildings, or from a hill outside the college town. Likewise, if he wishes to describe a cat as it lies before the fire, he must know definitely where it lies and how the lights fall. Otherwise he would have no means whatever of limiting the details; his description would be a jumble of things large and small, near and remote, which would be utterly confusing, if not actually ridiculous. Nor would he have any means of showing the relations between details. For all sense impressions change with distance, — not only details of size, but

also details of color, of sound, and of odor. Accordingly, we find every skillful writer most careful in fixing a definite place and time for his descriptions, and holding to the point of view consistently.

This demand for the faithful maintenance of a definite point of view does not mean, however, that having decided to describe a college campus from a hill outside the town, the writer cannot give his reader a nearer view of it in the same sketch; that having shown the beauties of the campus on an autumn morning, he cannot also picture its charms on a moonlight evening in spring; that having given a view of the exterior of a college building, he cannot describe its interior as well. Obviously the writer's purpose often demands that a description be as complete as possible, and to that end he will describe the same scene or object from several points of view. Moreover, he may even need to present material that can be observed only by moving continuously, — tramping through a piece of woods, driving up a mountainside, or riding on a train along the course of some river. In fact, if description is not to be severely restricted in its usefulness, changes in the point of view will sometimes be absolutely necessary. But whenever any such shift is made, or whenever the point of view is progressive, the writer must be careful to warn his reader. To be sure, he need not come out in a bald, mechanical manner and say that the reader is to consider himself moved along from one place to another; but unobtrusively, deftly, by suggestion as much as by explicit statement, he must make every change unmistakable. In the following passage from *The Fall of the House of Usher*, Poe shows the right kind of skill:

> Shaking off from my spirit what *must* have been a dream, I scanned more narrowly the real aspect of the building. Its principal feature seemed to be that of an excessive antiquity. The discoloration of ages had been great. Minute fungi overspread the whole exterior, hanging in a fine, tangled web-work from the eaves. Yet all this was apart from any extraordinary dilapidation. No portion of the masonry had fallen; and there appeared to be a wild inconsistency between its still perfect adaptation of parts, and the

crumbling condition of the individual stones. In this there was much that reminded me of the specious totality of old woodwork which has rotted for years in some neglected vault, with no disturbance from the breath of the external air. Beyond this indication of extensive decay, however, the fabric gave little token of instability. Perhaps the eye of a scrutinizing observer might have discovered a barely perceptible fissure, which, extending from the roof of the building in front, made its way down the wall in a zigzag direction, until it became lost in the sullen waters of the tarn.

Noticing these things, I rode over a short causeway to the house. A servant in waiting took my horse, and I entered the Gothic archway of the hall. A valet, of stealthy step, thence conducted me, in silence, through many dark and intricate passages in my progress to the studio of his master. . . .

The room in which I found myself was very large and lofty. The windows were long, narrow, and pointed, and at so vast a distance from the black oaken floor as to be altogether inaccessible from within. Feeble gleams of encrimsoned light made their way through the trellised panes, and served to render sufficiently distinct the more prominent objects around; the eye, however, struggled in vain to reach the remoter angles of the chamber, or the recesses of the vaulted and fretted ceiling. Dark draperies hung upon the walls. The general furniture was profuse, comfortless, antique, and tattered. Many books and musical instruments lay scattered about, but failed to give any vitality to the scene. I felt that I breathed an atmosphere of sorrow. An air of stern, deep, and irredeemable gloom hung over and pervaded all.

2. **Mental attitude.** — Furthermore, a mental point of view is involved in descriptive writing. Inasmuch as two people never describe the same scene in the same way, it is evident that the individual writer's sensing of things is always affected by his attitude of mind. But more than this, in any description which is at all personal there is likely to be a special state of mind, or a mood, which determines what details are sensed and how they influence the one who senses them. The same college campus which seems one sort of place to the homesick freshman seems quite another sort of place to the eager junior or the reminiscent alumnus. Likewise, in the following paragraph from Irving, it is easy to see that the writer's pronounced impatience to be out and on his way led him to perceive only the gloomy aspect of things:

A wet Sunday in a country inn! — whoever has had the luck to experience one can alone judge of my situation. The rain pattered against the casements; the bells tolled for church with a melancholy sound. I went to the windows in quest of something to amuse the eye; but it seemed as if I had been placed completely out of the reach of all amusement. The windows of my bedroom looked out among tiled roofs and stacks of chimneys, while those of my sitting-room commanded a full view of the stable-yard. I know of nothing more calculated to make a man sick of this world than a stable-yard on a rainy day. The place was littered with wet straw that had been kicked about by travelers and stable-boys. In one corner was a stagnant pool of water, surrounding an island of muck; there were several half-drowned fowls crowded together under a cart, among which was a miserable, crest-fallen cock, drenched out of all life and spirit; his drooping tail matted, as it were, into a single feather, along which the water trickled from his back; near the cart was a half-dozing cow, chewing the cud, and standing patiently to be rained on, with wreaths of vapor rising from her reeking hide; a wall-eyed horse, tired of the loneliness of the stable, was poking his spectral head out of a window, with the rain dripping on it from the eaves; an unhappy cur, chained to a dog-house hard by, uttered something every now and then, between a bark and a yelp; a drab of a kitchen wench tramped backwards and forwards through the yard in pattens, looking as sulky as the weather itself; everything in short was comfortless and forlorn, excepting a crew of hardened ducks, assembled like boon companions round a puddle, and making a riotous noise over their liquor.[1]

Of course, any such special mental state or mood, when once it is taken, must be consistently maintained. Yet there need be no violation of unity, if the mental point of view is varied in order to combine different impressions of the same person or place. A writer may want to contrast the beauty which a garden has for some artistic guest with the hopelessly forbidding look which it has for the boy who must weed it; or to set the irritating noisiness which a city street has for him in an hour of weariness over against the stimulating hum of busy life as it comes to him in an hour of eager strength. These changes in mental attitude may be made as the occasion suggests; but, like changes in the physical point of view, they must bring no confusion to the reader.

[1] Irving, *Bracebridge Hall.*

B. Selection

1. **Necessity of selection.** — The second step in the descriptive process is selection. Once the writer has a definite point of view, his next concern is to know what details he ought to put in and what he can well leave out in order to give his reader just as clear and vivid an image as possible. Of course, he cannot hope to include all the details of real life. It is plainly futile for him to try to mention every line on a man's face, every twig on a tree, every separate sound on a spring morning. Neither he nor any other artist can compete with life, for "Life goes before us, infinite in complication." The painter and the sculptor realize this and do not try to get photographic exactness in their work. The writer, too, must realize that to attempt cataloguing every possible detail would tend to eliminate all individuality and suggestiveness from his sketches. A mere inventory is never artistic, and description without selection is hopelessly tedious and confusing. Yet on the other hand it is possible that the details may be too meager, leaving the image in the reader's mind dim and indistinct. A great problem for every descriptive writer, therefore, is to find the right details, the ones that will be most useful in conveying his mental image to his reader.

2. **Finding essential details.** — If his description is to be successful, he must, in the first place, find those details which will clearly individualize his object. Whether he intends merely to suggest an image or whether he aims at careful identification, there will always be many details which are utterly inconsequential for purposes of the description and comparatively few which have real power to characterize. For instance, in describing a man it does not help much to say that he is five feet ten inches in height, with brown hair, blue eyes, and a smooth face; there are thousands of men who can be pictured in this way. Again, in describing a particular student's room, the conventional pillows and pennants and photographs are far less important than a well-framed copy

of Whistler's "Mother" on the wall or a toothbrush on the floor under a chair. Only those details which seem to belong peculiarly to the object have the greatest descriptive value. These significant details, however, are not always easy to find. As we all know from everyday experience, it is sometimes difficult to say just what is distinctive about objects with which we have long been familiar, and even more difficult to catch the most characteristic points about objects which are new. We may be asked to describe our own house so that a friend can locate it, and be at a loss to make it stand out unmistakably among the other houses in the same neighborhood. We may know perfectly well the difference between oak and ash, between a robin's note and a cardinal's, between the taste of veal and chicken, and yet when we are asked just where the difference lies, we may be unable to make any specific reply. Still these simple matters of characterization, and far more difficult ones, too, can be mastered. It is not especially remarkable to come upon a blind man who can identify his friend's step on the sidewalk, or a housewife who can distinguish her visitors by the way they ring the doorbell. Occasionally we even find a man who can recognize a stone-mason by the gestures he makes when he speaks in a political meeting, or one who can tell a violinist from a cellist by the way he swings his arms when he walks. The essential in this skill seems to be not only a quick perception, but also the habit of clear and decisive gazing, for as Mr. Burroughs has said, "not by a first casual glance, but by a steady, deliberate aim of the eye, are the rare and characteristic things discovered." And back of all is the knowledge of what to look for. The naturalist, the painter, and the sculptor alike know just what gives individuality to the objects which they present. In like manner the writer, while he observes closely, must also know what to count most significant in his observations.

Yet in the selection of details the writer of effective description must consider more than their distinctiveness. He will naturally wish to stimulate attention and at the same time to

economize his reader's effort. This ideal cannot be attained without recognizing the fundamental part which memory plays in the communication of all sense impressions. Whenever we read a description, consciously or unconsciously we call up some image or images from our past experience as a means of visualizing the new object. "A spacious, old-fashioned house, painted in yellow and white"; "A sunburnt, pock-marked sailor, ill-looking and raw-boned"; "The tops of the trees lying all speckled and furry under the moonlight"; — all these have meaning for us only as they are related to the images which are stored up in our minds. To succeed in conveying a mental image to others, then, a writer must get details which are at once highly suggestive and common to universal experience. Perhaps, as Carlyle said, it will be some slight and apparently accidental detail which he will choose — "a light-gleam, which instantaneously excites the mind and urges it to complete the picture, and evolve the meaning thereof for itself." Or very probably he will find details which are important both for characterization and for suggestiveness. But in any case, by taking a familiar detail which stimulates the reader's imagination, he can give not only that single detail, but also many others which are associated with it in the reader's memory. Thus he can combine a maximum of vividness in his writing with a minimum of effort on the part of his reader.

Furthermore, the writer's dominant impression of the object or scene which he undertakes to present will influence him in the selection of details. We all know how the same woman will seem brisk and refreshingly independent to one painter, abrupt and haughty to another; and each portrays her according to his own conception. Similarly, a great city like New York affects various painters in various ways; to one the message of Manhattan is "I suffer," to another "I sing," to another "I work," to a fourth "I dream"; and each one draws his scenes from the life of the great city to suit his own impression.[1] In the same manner, a writer usually has some chief impression

[1] Louis Baury, *The Message of Manhattan*, Bookman, Vol. 33, p. 592.

of what he perceives. It may be an impression of new spring greenness, of noisy confusion, of quaintness, of gray melancholy, of teasing sweetness, of solemn beauty; or it may be an impression produced by the special mental point of view held by the writer. But whatever it is, it affects his choice of details. Those are selected which will bring out this dominant effect. Indeed it is in this way that we get the writer's interpretation of his subject. And just as we value the painting over the photograph, because of its greater individuality, so ordinarily the description which shows the writer's personal feeling is to be preferred over the one which is colorless and matter-of-fact.

C. Grouping

1. **For prominence.** — How shall the details thus selected be arranged? The principle of emphasis, of course, requires that those details which are especially useful in conveying the image be made prominent by their position. They may be important because they have most power to individualize or because they attract immediate attention. In any case they should come in the initial sentence or else be massed at the end. Thus in the quotation from Poe on pages 307–308 we find the "principal feature" of the house named at once, and in the following from Mr. Sidney Colvin's Introduction to Stevenson's letters the writer holds back his friend's most striking feature until last:

> Imagine all this [Stevenson's brilliance in company] helped by the most speaking of presences: a steady, penetrating fire in the brown, wide-set eyes, a compelling power and richness in the smile; courteous, waving gestures of the arms and long, nervous hands, a lit cigarette generally held between the fingers; continual rapid shiftings and pacings to and fro as he conversed: rapid, but not flurried nor awkward, for there was a grace in his attenuated but well-carried figure, and his movements were light, deft, and full of spring. There was something for strangers, and even for friends, to get over in the queer garments which in youth it was his whim to wear — the badge, as they always seemed to me, partly of a genuine carelessness, certainly of a genuine lack of cash (the little he had was always absolutely at the disposal of his friends), partly of a deliberate detachment from any particular social class

or caste, partly because of his love of pickles and adventures, which he thought befell a man thus attired more readily than another. But this slender, slovenly, nondescript apparition, long-visaged and long-haired, had only to speak in order to be recognized in the first minute for a witty and charming gentleman, and within the first five for a master spirit and man of genius.

2. For natural order. — But the problem of grouping descriptive details involves far more than giving a few important ones prominent position. If the reader is to get a distinct picture and get it without unnecessary labor, all the details must be arranged in an order that is easy to follow. In doing this, the writer can best be guided by the natural order of observation; that is, he ought to enumerate his details in the same order in which one would actually sense them. Although it is true that we are rarely conscious of separate steps in the perception of objects, we can soon discover by experimenting that as a usual thing we first get an impression of an object or scene as a whole and then get the particular details. Occasionally a single detail may "leap to meet the senses" — perhaps it is a scar or a brilliant red necktie in the case of a man whom we see for the first time; a lone, tall tree or a blazing fire in the case of a landscape. But normally it is quite the contrary. We get only a general effect of what is before us; a general notion of size and shape, with perhaps some idea of predominant color or sound or odor. As we pass people in the street, we see at first glance only a tall, straight figure dressed as a man, or a bent figure dressed as a woman, or a short round figure dressed as a boy. As we ride through the country, we note first only a great open green expanse or dark, high hills and the fragrance of many pines. After that, of course, we add the more specific details. Since this is the natural order of perception, then, the writer obviously will gain by arranging the details of his description in the same way.

A further hint for orderly arrangement will often be found in the character of the material involved. Sometimes the separate details will naturally follow space relations; sometimes they

will follow each other in the order of time; sometimes they will group themselves by senses, all sound details together, all color details together, and so on. In describing a landscape it is well to pass in an orderly way from the foreground to the background, from the left to the right. In describing a person it helps to group together facial details, details of dress, details of pose or gait, and the like. As an example of what can be done in this way to reduce the reader's confusion to a minimum and insure an essentially accurate image, the following paragraph will bear careful study:

George Washington may be described as being as straight as an Indian, measuring six feet two inches in his stockings, and weighing 175 pounds when he took his seat in the Houses of Burgesses in 1759. His frame is padded with well-developed muscles, indicating great strength. His bones and joints are large, as are his feet and hands. He is wide-shouldered, but has not a deep or round chest; is neat-waisted, but is broad across the hips, and has rather long legs and arms. His head is well-shaped though not large, and is gracefully poised on a superb neck. A large and straight rather than prominent nose; blue-gray penetrating eyes, which are widely separated and overhung by a heavy brow. His face is long rather than broad, with high round cheek-bones, and terminates in a good firm chin. He has a clear though rather a colorless pale skin, which burns with the sun. A pleasing, benevolent, though a commanding countenance, dark brown hair, which he wears in a cue. His mouth is large, and generally firmly closed, but from time to time discloses some defective teeth. His features are regular and placid, with all the muscles of his face under perfect control, though flexible and expressive of deep feeling when aroused by emotion. In conversation he looks you full in the face, is deliberate, deferential, and engaging. His voice is agreeable rather than strong. His demeanor at all times composed and dignified.[1]

In some cases it is even possible to give the reader the aid of a simple framework or plan, called a "fundamental image," with reference to which all the details may be placed in his mind. Thus, for instance, we have Hugo's famous description of the field of Waterloo in terms of the letter A, and Stevenson's descrip-

[1] Quoted from George Nurse in Ford's *The True George Washington*. J. B. Lippincott Company. Used by Professor Carpenter in his *Rhetoric and English Composition*.

tion of the Bay of Monterey in terms of a bent fishing hook. Indeed this means appears frequently in daily life where such popular names as Jug Rock, Horseshoe Falls, Sugar Loaf Mountain, and such nicknames as Pin, Splinter, and Egg really imply a fundamental image. A good demonstration of the value it may have when an appropriate device can be found, appears in Hugo's *The Man Who Laughs:*

> The peninsula of Portland, viewed geometrically, presents the appearance of a bird's head, of which the bill is turned towards the ocean, the back of the head towards Weymouth; the isthmus is its neck.

D. Blending

There is still another step in the process. After fixing a definite point of view, selecting the essential details, and grouping them so that the important ones will be prominent and all will stand in a natural order, the writer must blend these separate details to give an unbroken total effect. It is only the clumsy beginner in any art who sets down a number of details and leaves them entirely unrelated, unfused. The dominant impression in the artist's mind will not only determine his choice of details, but will also unify his treatment of them. Some one detail will become the central detail and all others will be related to it; or some one effect will become the chief effect and the several details used to bring this out will thus be fully blended. In describing a scene from country life, for example, a writer must do more than enumerate a plowed field and a house and a lawn and a tree and a chair and a man and a newspaper and a dog; that would almost inevitably produce a miscellaneous result. He must draw these details together to give something of the total effect of the scene,—perhaps idleness or restfulness or intelligent thrift. In the passage from Poe already quoted there is masterly blending, especially in the paragraph where he describes Usher's room. In the last sentence he assists his readers to unify his description by specifying that "an air of stern, deep, and irredeemable gloom hung over and pervaded

all." The same blending to give one pronounced effect and the same use of a unifying device appear in the following paragraph. Here Irving brings out a single impression of the farm through his introductory characterization of the farmer.

Old Baltus Van Tassel was a perfect picture of a thriving, contented, liberal-hearted farmer. He seldom, it is true, sent either his eyes or his thoughts beyond the boundaries of his own farm; but within these everything was snug, happy, and well-conditioned. He was satisfied with his wealth, but not proud of it; and piqued himself upon the hearty abundance, rather than the style in which he lived. His stronghold was situated on the banks of the Hudson, in one of those green, sheltered, fertile nooks, in which the Dutch farmers are so fond of nestling. A great elm-tree spread its broad branches over it; at the foot of which bubbled up a spring of the softest and sweetest water, in a little well, formed of a barrel; and then stole sparkling away through the grass, to a neighboring brook, that bubbled along among alders and dwarf willows. Hard by the farmhouse was a vast barn, that might have served for a church; every window and crevice of which seemed bursting forth with the treasures of the farm; the flail was busily resounding within it from morning to night; swallows and martins skimmed twittering about the eaves; and rows of pigeons, some with one eye turned up, as if watching the weather, some with their heads under their wings, or buried in their bosoms, and others swelling, and cooing, and bowing about their dames, were enjoying the sunshine on the roof. Sleek, unwieldy porkers were grunting in the repose and abundance of their pens; whence sallied forth, now and then, troops of sucking pigs, as if to snuff the air. A stately squadron of snowy geese were riding in an adjoining pond, convoying whole fleets of ducks; regiments of turkeys were gobbling through the farmyard, and guinea fowls fretting about it, like ill-tempered housewives, with their peevish, discontented cry. Before the barn door strutted the gallant cock, that pattern of a husband, a warrior, and a fine gentleman, clapping his burnished wings, and crowing in the pride and gladness of his heart.[1]

III. SPECIAL DESCRIPTIVE MEANS

A. Comparison

Such, then, is the general process. Every piece of description, whatever its length or kind, necessarily involves fixing a definite point of view, selecting details, grouping them,

[1] Irving, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.*

and blending them. It is useful, in addition, to know some of the special means which the descriptive writer may employ. Very often, for instance, he will find that he can best call up an image in his reader's mind by likening it to one which his reader has already formed. He may do it in a single figurative word, as "fruit of a most untempting frowziness," "great ungainly splashes of shadow," and "a soft pour of sound." He may work out the figure more explicitly, as does Mr. Burroughs when he says, "The west wind the other day came fraught with a perfume that was to the sense of smell what a wild and delicate strain of music is to the ear;" [1] or Mr. Richard Harding Davis when he says, "His body was swept by the fever, which overran him like an army of tiny mice, touching his hot skin with cold, tingling taps of their scampering feet." [2] Or he may even elaborate a fuller comparison, as in the case of the famous Homeric similes. Of course, the writer must keep within the range of his reader's experience and he must never seem to strain after an effect. But when wisely made, a comparison is an excellent means of presenting an object which is altogether new and strange to the reader, or one which baffles more direct methods. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that in a sense all description is comparative, since, as we have already explained, a reader must always image things in terms of his own sense experiences. To invite him, through an apt comparison, to put one thing alongside another in his mind, therefore, is really helping him to make an interpretation of the writer's description which he would have to make consciously or unconsciously in any case.

B. Contrast

Very similar to description by comparison is description by contrast. Here there is the same advantage of setting the object described beside something which the reader already knows;

[1] April Odors in *Birds and Poets*. Houghton Mifflin Company.
[2] *A Derelict*.

but the points of difference rather than the points of resemblance are brought out. And quite evidently, points of unlikeness will often be more significant in individualizing an object than points of likeness. Stevenson, for instance, in characterizing the "voice of the Pacific," says, "The sound of the sea still follows you as you advance, like that of wind among the trees, only harsher and stranger to the ear." And Ruskin uses this same device more elaborately in his description of St. Mark's, where he develops in detail the differences between the grim cathedral of a quiet English town and the splendid cathedral in Venice. It is not at all necessary, however, to combine contrast with comparison or to work out the contrast explicitly. In fact, the more usual way is simply to bring unlikes into juxtaposition. By placing certain details in sharp contrast with certain others, some important feature of the thing described can be made to stand out distinctly. Just as the jeweler gives a foil to a stone, and the painter uses a spot of brilliant color in the midst of dull hues or a spot of light against heavy shadows, so a writer may well seize every fair opportunity of increasing the vividness of his image by means of contrasts. Thus in the midst of an altogether comfortless and forlorn scene Irving introduces "a crew of hardened ducks, assembled like boon companions round a puddle," and in the description of St. Mark's mentioned above, Ruskin leads up to his picture of the magnificent cathedral with a picture of a narrow alley filled with the din of petty business.

C. Suggestion by Effects

A third special means of making description adequate is what might be called the mirror method. Instead of giving the reader a direct delineation of the object, the writer may arrange for him to see the effect which this object has on some one else. Thus in daily life we get some impression of the taste of medicine by the facial expression of the person swallowing it, or of the activities outside a classroom by the attitude of the students

seated near the windows or door. In like manner, a writer may hold up a mirror, as it were, and let the reader catch the image by suggestion. It might seem that such a method is unnecessarily indirect and uncertain; and of course very often it is less desirable than one which is more direct and definite. Yet there are some problems that the most skillful writer can best meet in this way. In presenting the matchless beauty of Helen, for example, both Homer and Marlowe suggest her appearance by the unusual effects which her beauty had on others. Irving tells us that whenever the village people cast eyes on Rip Van Winkle they invariably stroked their chins; and in depicting the horrible ugliness of Mr. Hyde, Stevenson tells us that one look at him brought out the sweat like running. Similarly, there is probably no better description of Niagara Falls possible than that which shows the hushed awe which comes over everyone who beholds the wonderful scene. Indeed the wise writer will hardly risk making direct description convincing when he has to depict any extraordinary person or scene. He will prefer to depend on suggestion, and thus let each reader call up an image of his own which will be for him one of extraordinary beauty, or ugliness, or grandeur. Moreover, this description by effects may be particularly useful in relieving the writer from certain limitations which are inherent in his chosen point of view. Thus in *Treasure Island*, when Stevenson needs to describe what goes on in two parts of the island at the same time, but is held to the point of view of the boy who is concealing himself in some brush near one of the conspirators, he very skillfully uses the movements and sounds of the birds to suggest what is going on in the more distant spot.

D. Narration

Finally, it is possible to secure good descriptive results by narration. This sounds paradoxical at first, perhaps, and yet it is easy enough for a writer to tell us what a certain person or object does in such a way that we form an image of it rather

than see the successive events as parts of a transaction. There are several instances of this in the *Iliad*, but none better than the account of Achilles's shield; we read what Vulcan did to make it, and get a good image of the finished weapon thereby. Likewise, the following passage from a narrative of travel, when taken by itself, has primarily descriptive value:

> At last there was a clicking of flint and steel, and presently there stood out from darkness one of the tawny faces of my muleteers, bent down to near the ground, and suddenly lit up by the glowing of the spark, which he courted with careful breath. Before long there was a particle of dry fiber, or leaf, that kindled to a tiny flame; then another was lit from that, and then another. Then small, crisp twigs, little bigger than bodkins, were laid athwart the glowing fire. The swelling cheeks of the muleteer laid level with the earth, blew tenderly at first, and then more boldly, upon the young flame, which was daintily nursed and fed, and fed more plentifully when it gained good strength. At last a whole armful of dry bushes was piled up over the fire, and presently with loud, cheery cracking and crackling, a royal tall blaze shot up from the earth, and showed me once more the shapes and faces of my men, and the dim outlines of the horses and mules that stood grazing hard by.[1]

Indeed it is even possible for a whole narrative to exist for purposes of description. An account of what a little girl and her big brother did in making a playhouse in their yard may well give us a mental picture of the house rather than tell us a real story. Yet ordinarily this device of description through narration is useful rather in connection with narratives than in any piece with purely descriptive purpose. Its full value in this way will appear in the next chapter, where the necessity of avoiding anything which obstructs the progress of the action in a narrative is pointed out.

IV. EFFECTIVENESS IN DESCRIPTION

With an analysis of the general descriptive process, supplemented by these four suggestions about special means which may be employed in some cases, we have about completed our

[1] Alexander W. Kinglake, *Eothen*, p. 100.

survey of descriptive technique. Some matters connected with the problem of making description effective still remain, however, and, as in the case of exposition, it will be simpler to discuss them under the separate heads of instrumental and æsthetic. Since these two kinds of description are more or less different in purpose and method, we cannot measure their effectiveness by exactly the same standards.

A. Effective Instrumental Description

What, then, makes instrumental description effective? When is a scientist's description of a bird, or a playwright's account of a stage setting, or a real estate agent's advertisement of a country home effective? Evidently it cannot fulfill its purpose if it does not in the first place give the reader a clear, accurate image of details. But a mere inventory or catalogue of details about a person, a building, a town, will never do; not only is it utterly devoid of individuality and interest, but it also fails to produce a distinct image in the reader's mind. He may know in a purely intellectual way what is there, but he will not see the object as a whole nor see it vividly. Some suggestiveness, some appeal to the imagination, some regard for effects, is necessary if the description be truly successful. This does not mean that the naturalist's description of a flower or a bird may compromise scientific accuracy or intellectual clearness, nor that the publicity agent may substitute the workings of a lively imagination for definite facts. Indeed, every descriptive writer who undertakes to give information must be most discriminating in his selection of significant details, most careful in his arrangement of these details, and most exact in his use of words. But it does mean that he must realize that full effectiveness here, as in all instrumental writing, calls for more than bare accuracy and clearness. Almost any of the work of such men as Gilbert White and Mr. John Burroughs shows the possibilities of literary quality in scientific description. As specimens of this larger success let us consider the following:

(1) Such a cavity makes a snug, warm home, and when the entrance is on the underside of the limb, as is usual, the wind and snow cannot reach the occupant. Late in December, while crossing a high, wooded mountain, lured by the music of the fox-hounds, I discovered fresh yellow chips strewing the new-fallen snow, and at once thought of my woodpeckers. On looking around I saw where one had been at work excavating a lodge in a small yellow birch. The orifice was about fifteen feet from the ground, and appeared as round as if struck with a compass. It was on the east side of the tree, so as to avoid the prevailing west and northwest winds. As it was nearly two inches in diameter, it could not have been the work of the downy, but must have been that of the hairy, or else the yellow-bellied woodpecker. His home had probably been wrecked by some violent wind, and he was thus providing himself another. In digging out these retreats the woodpeckers prefer a dry, brittle trunk, not too soft. They go in horizontally to the center and then turn downward, enlarging the tunnel as they go, till when finished it is the shape of a long, deep pear.

(2) When spring pushes pretty hard, many buds begin to sweat as well as to glow; they exude a brown, fragrant, gummy substance that affords the honey-bee her first cement and hive varnish. The hickory, the horse-chestnut, the plane-tree, the poplars, are all coated with this April myrrh. That of certain poplars, like the Balm of Gilead, is the most noticeable and fragrant, — no spring incense more agreeable. Its perfume is often upon the April breeze. I pick up the bud scales of the poplars along the road, long brown scales like the beaks of birds, and they leave a rich gummy odor in my hand that lasts for hours. I frequently detect the same odor about my hives when the bees are making all snug against the rains, or against the millers. When used by the bees, we call it propolis. Virgil refers to it as a "glue more adhesive than bird-lime and the pitch of Phrygian Ida." Pliny says it is extracted from the tears of the elm, the willow, and the reed. The bees often have serious work to detach it from their leg-baskets, and make it stick only where they want it to.

The bud scales begin to drop in April, and by May Day the scales have fallen from the eyes of every branch in the forest. In most cases the bud has an inner wrapping that does not fall so soon. In the hickory this inner wrapping is like a great livid membrane, an inch or more in length, thick, fleshy, and shining. It clasps the tender leaves about as if both protecting and nursing them. As the leaves develop, these membranous wrappings curl back, and finally wither and fall. In the plane-tree, or sycamore, this inner wrapping of the bud is a little pelisse of soft yellow or tawny fur. When it is cast off, it is the size of one's thumb-nail, and suggests the delicate skin of some golden-haired mole. The young sycamore balls lay aside their fur wrappings early in May. The flower tassels of the European maple, too, come packed in a slightly furry covering. The long and fleshy inner scales that

enfold the flowers and leaves are of a clear olive green, thinly covered with silken hairs like the young of some animals. Our sugar maple is less striking and beautiful in the bud, but the flowers are more graceful and fringelike.[1]

B. Effective Æsthetic Description

Æsthetic description, on the other hand, exists primarily to please. It appeals to the imagination through the suggestiveness of its details. The passing of an express train is given by "a blur of maroon enamel, a bar of white light from the electrics in the cars, and a flicker of nickel-plated handrail on the rear platform."[2] Although clearness and distinctness must not be compromised to the extent of vague or whimsical impressionism, no exact delineation is required. The prime essentials are imaginative vividness and emotional warmth. The details used must be highly suggestive and must blend to give the character of the object or the atmosphere of the scene as the writer feels it. Moreover, as in all fine art, simplification is the ideal; every unnecessary stroke must be eliminated. It is true of descriptive writing more than of any other kind that "the images are the magic of style."[3]

One of the best ways of making æsthetic description effective, and one which deserves particular emphasis, is to take full advantage of all the senses. To be sure, most people depend very largely upon the eye for their impressions of the outer world, but there are wonderful possibilities of perception through the ear, the nose, the tongue, and the finger tips for him whose training has made them sensitive. Then, too, writers are often misled by the interesting parallel between description and painting. Now in spite of many points of real similarity which are genuinely instructive, the writer must realize that description is in no sense mere word-painting. It is foolish for him to put himself in fruitless competition with the painter, who can always excel in the representation of line and color, when he has his own chance to excel by using details of motion, odor,

[1] Burroughs, *A Year in the Fields*, pp. 29, 55–57. Houghton Mifflin Company.
[2] Kipling, *.007*.
[3] Albalat, *L'Art d'Écrire*, p. 272.

sound, taste, and touch. By the full use of sense details he can give his description an effect of reality which it would be hard to gain in any other way. What, for instance, would a description of a storm be without the element of sound, or a description of early spring without the characteristic odors, or a description of a slum street without the confusion of things seen and heard and smelled? No better illustration of this abundance of sensation can be found than in Mr. Kipling's *Jungle Book*, from which the following lines are taken:

At last the elephants began to lie down one after another as is their custom, till only Kala Nag at the right of the line was left standing up; and he rocked slowly from side to side, his ears put forward to listen to the night wind as it blew very slowly across the hills. The air was full of all the night noises that, taken together, make one big silence — the click of one bamboo-stem against the other, the rustle of something alive in the undergrowth, the scratch and squawk of a half-waked bird (birds are awake in the night much more often than we imagine) and the fall of water ever so far away. Little Toomai slept for some time, and when he waked it was brilliant moonlight, and Kala Nag was still standing up with his ears cocked. Little Toomai turned, rustling in the fodder, and watched the curve of his big back against half the stars in heaven, and while he watched he heard, so far away that it sounded no more than a pinhole of noise pricked through the stillness, the "hoot-toot" of a wild elephant. . . .

There was one blast of furious trumpeting from the lines, and then the silence shut down on everything, and Kala Nag began to move. Sometimes a tuft of high grass washed along his sides as a wave washes along the sides of a ship, and sometimes a cluster of wild-pepper vines would scrape along his back, or a bamboo would creak where his shoulder touched it; but between those times he moved absolutely without any sound, drifting through the thick Garo forest as though it had been smoke. He was going uphill, but though Little Toomai watched the stars in the rifts of the trees, he could not tell in what direction.

Then Kala Nag reached the crest of the ascent and stopped for a minute, and Little Toomai could see the tops of the trees lying all speckled and furry under the moonlight for miles and miles, and the blue-white mist over the river in the hollow. Toomai leaned forward and looked, and he felt that the forest was awake below him — awake and alive and crowded. A big brown fruit-eating bat rushed past his ear; a porcupine's quills rattled in the thicket, and in the darkness between the tree-stems he heard a hog-bear digging hard in the moist warm earth, and snuffing as it digged.

Then the branches closed over his head again, and Kala Nag began to go down into the valley — not quietly this time, but as a runaway gun goes down a steep bank — in one rush. The huge limbs moved as steadily as pistons, eight feet to each stride, and the wrinkled skin of the elbow-points rustled. The undergrowth on either side of him ripped with a noise like torn canvas, and the saplings that he heaved away right and left with his shoulders sprang back again, and banged him on the flank, and great trails of creepers, all matted together, hung from his tusks as he threw his head from side to side and plowed out his pathway. Then Little Toomai laid himself down close to the great neck, lest a swinging bough should sweep him to the ground, and he wished that he were back in the lines again.

The grass began to get squashy, and Kala Nag's feet sucked and squelched as he put them down, and the night mist at the bottom of the valley chilled Little Toomai. There was a splash and a trample, and the rush of running water, and Kala Nag strode through the bed of a river, feeling his way at each step. Above the noise of the water, as it swirled round the elephant's legs, Little Toomai could hear more splashing and some trumpeting both up-stream and down — great grunts and angry snortings, and all the mist about him seemed to be full of rolling wavy shadows.[1]

Furthermore, the effectiveness of æsthetic description depends largely upon the writer's skill in selecting words. The same principles of choice which govern his use of words in other writing hold here: he must get specific words, apt words, words that are at once precise and expressive. But since æsthetic description is more personal than most writing, it shows a special need for words that are richly suggestive, perfectly suited to the writer's dominant effect, and delicately colored by his personality. In a sense the opportunity for "style" is greater in description than in any other writing except the essay.

And yet many a young writer, conscious of the importance of his diction, goes wrong in his very attempt to gain effects. He may not fall into trite phrases or indulge in an overuse of superlatives, for these are rather obvious faults, but unless he is a real master of his art he will blunder in ways almost as serious. In this little sketch, for instance, we find so many adjectives, both simple and in series, that they are overconspicuous, almost ludicrous:

[1] Reprinted by kind permission of Mr. Rudyard Kipling, the author, and The Century Company, the publishers of the *Jungle Book*.

I can see her yet, as she stood before the roomful of lively, healthy school children, almost any one of whom was as large as she. She seemed tiny and helpless, standing beside the formidable desk, her thin, narrow shoulders drooping forward weakly. Her slightly tilted chin was extended irresolutely forward. This, together with the arched brows, lifted high above the pale blue eyes, gave her a peculiarly questioning look. But for an occasional lighting up of the eyes, when she happened to glance at some particularly interested and interesting pupil, her colorless face was almost expressionless. Brushed primly back from the white, blue-veined temples, her bright, golden hair was wound in smooth braids around the crown of her small head. How characteristic were those nervous, jerky motions with which she waved her small, helpless looking hand, keeping time to the song she was leading in a high, thin voice! There was something so unusual, so strangely weazened in her appearance, although she was still very young, that I could not but think, "What a funny looking little bent old woman she will be some day!"[1]

It is true that the specific function of the adjective and its counterpart, the adverb, is to qualify or describe, but they are by no means the only words that can have descriptive value. Such nouns and verbs as *muck*, *clamor*, *hag*, *fringe*, *charger*, *sway*, *sift*, *huddle*, *drip*, *rattle*, *chatter*, and *shamble*, abound in the language, and each flashes a distinct image to the reader. To use them in description, then, will not only save a disagreeable multiplicity of adjectives and adverbs, but will also add a vigor and compression to the style which will greatly increase its graphic power.

Artificiality is another fault which may easily creep into the diction of descriptive writing. Sometimes a distorted mental point of view or an utter lack of good taste in the use of figurative language will betray a writer into saying that "the house smiled a welcome and the flowers held out fragrant blossoms by way of greeting" or that "the tulips and blades of grass drooped their tearful heads in trembling and shame, lest they had committed a fatal social error in responding too early to Dame Season's invitation to come forth." Such ridiculously false feeling is, of course, without justification. But not all questions of taste in the choice of descriptive words are easy.

[1] A student's theme.

In his effort to express his sense impressions vividly, a writer may quite unconsciously come to strain for effects, reaching out after unusual words, twisting familiar words into unusual uses, and piling up phrase on phrase, until the reader is led involuntarily to question his sincerity. Such lapsing into artificiality is noticeable in the first of the two sketches which follow, whereas the second one approaches the naturalness and simplicity of expression essential to the best art.

(1) Spring! And all below my window, field and road lay radiant in the shifting sheets of pearl that stars let down of an April night. And I smelled dallying, alluring sweetnesses; and I saw — not a laid-out landscape — just beds and sweeps of fresh new colors outlined with the gray-white pencilling of road and background hill. From out the rose-flushed slope of the meadow came drifting the vagrant scent of opened apple blossoms; along the shadow fence, rainbow hyacinths dripped overflowing incense on the air; and below the road clumps of new-born lilacs breathed fragrant lullabies from each purple-petaled flower. It was a world made up of seas of perfumed lights, all indistinct, vague, beautiful; and blending it — color and smell, road and field and hill — wavered a tinted, odorous mist. Spring! and my heart went mad to its orient colors and its wild, intoxicating smells — the breathless ecstasy of April night![1]

(2) I stepped out upon the deck into a world of dripping white. The bellowing of the fog whistle through the sleepless hours from a little after midnight — it was then close to five o'clock — had somewhat prepared me for what to expect, but I had never imagined fog so thick as that. I stumbled forward, and, crossing the deck, found a sailor "heaving the lead" on the starboard side. The engines were turning over very slowly, barely enough to furnish "steerageway." I stood for some time watching in silence. At last I timidly ventured to ask our whereabouts.

"I think we're some'eres in Whitefish Bay," the man at the rail answered.

"'The sailor's graveyard,'" I quoted, forcing a laugh.

"Right: the sailor's graveyard."

There was in his tone something of such calm assurance that it made me shiver in the damp, cold air. He went on methodically, taking in his line and then paying it out again; taking in, paying out, his eyes intent on the task in hand.

Out of the fog loomed a black, blunt bow, and on the instant, from the lookout up forward, from the man at my side, and from the bridge, came the cry, "Port! hard aport!"

[1] A student's theme.

Sluggishly the big boat swung over and we slid down the length of a huge freighter, so close that I could have counted her battened hatches. There were hurried orders on the bridge, the tinkling of signal bells in the pilot house, and the scurrying of men. Two bounded along the deck and dived down the forward companionway. Immediately I heard the anchor chain rattling out and the plunge of the anchor into the water.

The melancholy blast of the fog whistle was stilled, and in its stead the ship's bell began to sound at minute intervals. All about us I could hear the "Dink-dink" of bells on other anchored boats. Now they seemed near, now far away: confusing and unreliable in the dense mist. I went up to the hurricane deck and strained my eyes against a pallid, intangible wall. Looking astern I noticed an increasing brightness, and rightly surmised that the sun was rising. At first the fog flattened down upon the black lake until the masts and superstructures of a surrounding fleet were visible. It was a wonderful effect. They appeared to be fairy ships afloat upon a fairy sea; and clear and musical came the "Ding-ding" of their bells. Thus, for a space, we swam upon the clouds. Then, gradually, the fog rose about us again; and soon, as the sun gained rapidly in power, it thinned and disappeared.

Presently I heard the clanking of the capstan and hurried forward to see the anchor come "inboard." Giant link by giant link its cable rose sparkling from the water, and at last up came the anchor itself, its flukes weighted with mud and weeds. The bell in the pilot house signaled "Half speed" then "Full speed ahead," and we went plowing on once more toward the "Soo."[1]

READINGS AND EXERCISES

1. In order to fix in mind the essential differences between instrumental and æsthetic description, try to describe (*a*) a house in a way that will give information necessary in selling it; (*b*) in a way that will express your own feeling of affection for it. Or try to describe (*a*) a hollow filled with spring flowers in a way that will enable a friend to recognize it; (*b*) in a way that will express your own delight.

2. How far is the difference between instrumental and æsthetic description paralleled by the difference between mechanical and free-hand drawing? between photography and painting?

3. Read Diderot's *Thoughts on Art and Style*, especially the sections entitled On Composition, My Strange Thoughts on Drawing, and What Everyone Knows about Expression and Something which

[1] A student's theme.

all the World does not Know. From these discussions of work in another art you can get many helpful suggestions about writing.

4. When you read, observe how skillful descriptive writers manage point of view, noting especially the ways in which they indicate changes. Then try (*a*) to describe the same person or object from two different positions; (*b*) to describe some scene from a progressing point of view; (*c*) to describe some object or scene as it appears at different times, for example, a garden in October and in June, or a city street on Saturday night and on Sunday morning.

5. Try to describe the hands of four or five friends or classmates. Before you begin, it will be well for you to study the human hand in order to find out just what details are really distinctive.

6. We are told that when Saint-Gaudens undertook to make his statue of Lincoln for Lincoln Park, Chicago, he asked several of Lincoln's friends what detail of posture would seem most characteristic to those who knew him well. They mentioned the position of his left hand and thumb. Can you find similarly distinctive details in the appearance of your friends?

7. What are the characteristic details of a town barber shop? of a crowded street car? of a dog fight? of a July thunder storm? of a milliner's shop?

8. Study the place which memory inevitably has in description. What image comes to mind upon mention of *chapel, bridge, automobile, cottage, plume, teacher?*

9. Read John LaFarge's *Considerations on Painting*, Chapter II. He shows how any artist reveals his individuality through selection of details.

10. In order to increase your appreciation of the less used senses, read in *The Story of My Life* what Helen Keller has to say of her sensations. The following is typical: "What a joy it is to feel the soft, springy earth under my feet once more, to follow grassy roads that lead to ferny brooks where I can bathe my fingers in a cataract of rippling notes, or to clamber over a stone wall into green fields that tumble and roll and climb in riotous gladness."

11. Can you describe the odors of an apple orchard in blossom? of an old attic? of a chemical laboratory? Can you describe the sounds of a bird store? of a city fire? of a ball game? of early morning in the country? Can you describe the sensations of a sickbed? of diving? of exploring a cave?

12. Make a list of at least thirty nouns and verbs which might be useful in describing human gait; facial expression; children's voices; water; trees.

13. What is meant by the "pathetic fallacy"? Read Ruskin's discussion of it.

14. Which of the following passages seem to you effective? In what respects is each superior or inferior?

a. The millionaire's south-bound express [was] laying the miles over his shoulder as a man peels a shaving from a soft board.

b. Directly above the house was a small cemetery with tombstones intermingling among the numerous cedars.

c. The sky was full of stars, but there was no moon.

d. The sky was clear and serene, and full of stars, but the moon was not there, for she had sought the stillness of peaceful walks of ancient nights.

e. The Spyglass, which was by three or four hundred feet the tallest [hill] on the island, was likewise the strangest in configuration, running up sheer from almost every side, and then suddenly cut off at the top like a pedestal to put a statue on.

f. Far up, into the recesses of the valley, the green vistas arched like the hollows of mighty waves of some crystalline sea, with the arbutus flowers dashed along their flanks for foam, and silver flakes of orange spray tossed into the air around them, breaking over the gray walls of rock into a thousand separate stars, fading and kindling alternately as the weak wind lifted and let them fall.

CHAPTER X — NARRATION

I. THE FIELD OF NARRATION

A. The Nature of Narration

Narration recounts sequential events. In one respect it is unlike exposition, argumentation, and description: it finds an almost unqualified advantage in the passing of time. In exposition and argumentation, where the writer's purpose is to make one understand or to win assent, it is important that the reader have many things in mind at one time in order that he may see their essential relations or comparative values; in description, where the writer's purpose is to make one see, the reader must perform the almost impossible mental feat of holding fragments of images in mind until some unifying suggestion blends them into one effect; but in narration, the time that passes while the reader is scanning the pages contributes to his more perfect comprehension by constantly suggesting the time that is passing in the narrative itself.

B. The Relation of Narration to Other Forms of Composition

Nevertheless, narration is very closely related to exposition and description. In the first place, it is almost inseparable from them because of characteristics which all three hold in common. Exposition, we have already noticed, sometimes explains most clearly when it takes the form of narration, as we easily discover if we attempt to explain a process of any kind. Description, too, is at times so much like narration that it is not always easy to distinguish the one from the other. As a matter of fact, in literature they are ever merging so completely that

the lines of demarcation are quite shadowy. But narration stands in close relation to exposition, description, and even argumentation in another way; it includes them. We cannot proceed very far in any narrative without employing exposition. Often it is quite necessary to explain kinship, to analyze motive, to comment, or to apologize, as in history, biography, and the longer pieces of fiction. Occasionally, too, as in Stevenson's *Travels with a Donkey*, the narrative style and the expository are combined to great advantage. Narration likewise includes description. When we begin a narrative, we almost immediately find ourselves employing description to give the necessary background, and sooner or later we must use it in clothing the characters with reality.

C. The Universal Interest in Narration

The wide inclusiveness of the field of narration well represents the almost universal attention which this form of writing receives from readers. An inherent curiosity makes us want to know how other people look, what they think, what their neighbors think of them, what they have done, what they are doing, what they are going to do, and what they would probably do under given circumstances. Some of us profess a dislike for gossip by word of mouth, but all of us enjoy it when it is tempered with a reasonable amount of dignity and printed in newspapers, magazines, and books. Thus narration, though not used so frequently as exposition in the daily routine of our lives, probably commands a wider and deeper interest than any of the other forms of composition. It is not only the medium through which we gain our knowledge of the people who carry on the world's work and the world's play, but it is the source of a large part of our intellectual recreation.

D. Classifications of Narration

No attempt to classify the many varieties of narrative art has been very successful. It is difficult to bring the novel, the

drama, the short story, the tale, the news story, the autobiography, the biography, and the narrative parts of history into any division that will result in a real simplification. Some writers have sought to divide the entire field into "simple narrative" and "complex narrative," and others have tried to arrive at the same end by making the basis of classification "mere chronology" and "cause and effect." These divisions are more or less inadequate, first, because it is not possible to have many persons agree concerning the point at which narrative ceases to be simple and becomes complex; and secondly, because any narrative that deserves the name involves logical as well as chronological arrangement. It is true, of course, that in primitive literature we may find a near approach to the purely chronological; but in the present day we are not writing after the manner of primitive peoples. We do not choose between chronology and some order of cause and effect; we simply try to adjust them.

Perhaps the most nearly satisfactory division is the one we have followed throughout this book; that is to say, we may bring all narration into two classes, instrumental and æsthetic, — narratives that aim primarily to give information, and narratives that seek to quicken the emotional life and satisfy the artistic instincts. Objection may be made that in this case the classification does not really classify; and there is some foundation for the objection. But inasmuch as it is a division that runs throughout the entire field of writing, and can be used here with a degree of convenience, we may well employ it. Thus the news story, the narrative parts of history, and virtually all biography and autobiography would be classed as instrumental; while the tale, the short story, the novel, and the drama would be classed as æsthetic.

II. THE ELEMENTS OF NARRATION

It should be borne in mind, however, that classifications are merely for convenience of study; that whether the narrative

take one or another of many literary forms, or whether its purpose be primarily to give information or to please the reader with interesting glimpses of human nature and human struggle, the elements are the same. At first thought, biography may seem quite unlike the novel, the news story unlike the short story, and the autobiography equally far removed from the tale; yet all of them demand events, characters, and time and place. They are the same in their essence. Stevenson has put the matter thus:

"The art of narrative, in fact, is the same whether it is applied to the selection and illustration of a real series of events or of an imaginary series. Boswell's *Life of Johnson* (a work of cunning and inimitable art) owes its success to the same technical maneuvers as (let us say) *Tom Jones:* the clear conception of certain characters of man, the choice and presentation of certain incidents out of a great number that offered, and the invention (yes, invention) and preservation of a certain key in dialogue. In which these things are done with the more art — in which with the greater air of nature — readers will differently judge. Boswell's is, indeed, a very special case, and almost a generic; but it is not only in Boswell, it is in every biography with any salt of life, it is in every history where events and men, rather than ideas, are presented — in Tacitus, in Carlyle, in Michelet, in Macaulay — that the novelist will find many of his own methods most conspicuously and adroitly handled."[1]

Our plan of study, then, will be first to deal with the elements common to all narrative, then to point out some of the things that contribute to effectiveness in each of the two kinds. If in the first part of the study it becomes necessary to deal more especially with one kind, we shall usually find an advantage in choosing fiction, inasmuch as it may be regarded as more highly developed technically than instrumental narrative, and for that reason more likely to bring up all possible problems of structure.

[1] *A Humble Remonstrance.*

A. Action

Of the three elements of narration, — action, character portrayal, and setting, — action must be regarded as first in importance. No student should let himself be misled into believing otherwise. It is true, of course, that different writers of narration go about their work in different ways, some beginning with a group of incidents, others with an interesting character, and others with a place or time that seems to invite the telling of a story in connection with it. Thus Poe has told us that he made his stories by finding a mood which he desired to express, and then creating events to suggest that mood; Stevenson, though he had much to say about the importance of time and place, was equally certain that the matters of real importance and real interest were the events; and George Meredith was no less certain that the only true center of narrative was character. And it might be observed in passing that as great a diversity of opinion has been expressed about the origin of a narrative that is not fictional. But these differences of opinion are not evidence against the importance of action; they simply show that different authors have different ways of approaching their work. Incident, character, or setting may be the origin, but the final purpose is to use the characters and the setting in giving the incidents a greater reality. The element that sets narration clearly apart from the other forms of writing is action. The characters may be remarkable, and they may live in an interesting time and place, but unless they do something, their creation is not justified. Action is the first essential.

In the following paragraphs, though the subject-matter varies widely, it is not difficult to see the moving spirit of narration. Scarcely a line fails to express action.

A news story:

HELD THE BABY FOR RENT

Mother Went to Court, Where Magistrate Corrigan Restored It

Jennie Davis moved out of 180 Ridge Street yesterday and left her three months old baby while she took a little furniture to another room she had

rented. There was two months' rent due on the room she had left, and when Jennie went back for the baby, Goldie Jacobs, who sublet to her, announced that she had a lien on that baby, and that it would remain there until the rent was forthcoming.

The tearful mother rushed over to the Essex Market police court and obtained a summons for Goldie and the baby. They appeared in the afternoon and Magistrate Corrigan awarded the baby to the mother.[1]

A paragraph from Bret Harte:

The cart was halted before the inclosure; and rejecting the offers of assistance with the same air of simple self-reliance he had displayed throughout, Tennessee's Partner lifted the rough coffin on his back, and deposited it, unaided, within the shallow grave. He then nailed down the board which served as a lid; and mounting the little mound of earth beside it, took off his hat, and slowly mopped his face with his handkerchief. This the crowd felt was a preliminary to speech; and they disposed themselves variously on stumps and bowlders, and sat expectant.[2]

A Biblical narrative:

And Deborah said unto Barak, Up; for this is the day in which the Lord hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the Lord gone out before thee? So Barak went down from mount Tabor, and ten thousand men after him. And the Lord discomfited Sisera, and all his chariots, and all his host, with the edge of the sword before Barak; so that Sisera lighted down off his chariot, and fled away on his feet. But Barak pursued after the chariots, and after the host, unto Harosheth of the Gentiles: and all the host of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; and there was not a man left. Howbeit Sisera fled away on his feet to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite: for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite. And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said unto him, Turn in, my lord, turn in to me; fear not. And when he had turned in unto her into the tent, she covered him with a mantle. And he said unto her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water to drink; for I am thirsty. And she opened a bottle of milk, and gave him drink, and covered him. Again he said unto her, Stand in the door of the tent, and it shall be, when any man doth come and inquire of thee, and say, Is there any man here? that thou shalt say, No. Then Jael Heber's wife took a tent pin, and took an hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the tent pin into his temples, and fastened it into the ground: for he was fast asleep; so he swooned and died.

[1] The New York *Sun*.

[2] *Tennessee's Partner*. Houghton Mifflin Company.

And, behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him, and said unto him, Come, and I will shew thee the man whom thou seekest. And when he came into her tent, behold, Sisera lay dead, and the tent pin was in his temples. So God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the children of Israel.[1]

1. **Mastery of the narrative material.** — The first step in rendering action effective is a thorough mastery of the material to be treated. The writer must know this material so completely that he can see at one view the end of the story and all the situations that lead up to it. He must remember that good writers, with comparatively few exceptions, work laboriously over their material for a long period before they put pen to paper. Indeed, the facility of some writers in reducing their stories to manuscript is in reality but an expression of the grasp of their material which they obtain before they begin the act of writing. Marion Crawford, for example, explained that his ability to write a long story in a few months arose from the fact that he invariably thought out his novels in all their details before he made any attempt to write them down. Some authors feel so deeply the importance of thus knowing the end from the beginning that instead of trying first to conceive the general outlines of the entire story, they try to see the final situation, then plan events that will most naturally and interestingly lead up to it. They know that one guiding motive must be the source of direction from the first sentence. "If you are going to make a book [novel] end badly, it must end badly from the beginning."[2] Thomas Bailey Aldrich relates that he went even further. "It would interest nobody," he says, "to know that I always write the last paragraph first, and then work directly up to that, avoiding all digressions and side issues."[3] Whether such a method of procedure is practicable for everyone is a matter open to question; but there can be no doubt about the necessity of knowing

[1] *Judges* iv, 14–23.

[2] Stevenson, A letter to J. M. Barrie. *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson.* Charles Scribner's Sons.

[3] In a note on the possibility of writing an essay to be called On the Art of Short Story Writing. *Complete Works*, Vol. IX, p. 30. Houghton Mifflin Company.

with reasonable definiteness in the beginning just how the story is to end.

Next in importance to knowing the end from the beginning is knowing where to take up the threads of the narrative. The very first paragraphs are momentous. Usually the difficulty encountered arises from the fact that life does not consist of organized groups of events conveniently classified and labeled to suit the narrator's purpose, but is instead an unending stream. Furthermore, the happenings in this current so intermingle that it is not possible to single one out and write about it to the exclusion of the others. To be more specific, the writer of a biography cannot deal solely with the one person about whom he writes; he must speak of those who have influenced that person's life, — his father and mother, his brothers and sisters, and his intimate friends. It is necessary to do this in order to give the reader the knowledge that will enable him to grasp the full significance of the biography proper. Again, the story-writer must give some of the action that preceded the groups of events with which he deals, else we cannot see these in their true perspective. The story is a cross-view of life, and the writer must determine how much in addition to the main view is necessary to a full understanding of what is spread directly before us. His story must not stand out in utter isolation, yet it must not be burdened with more antecedent action than is really necessary.

The ease with which too abundant antecedent action may embarrass and hinder the main action becomes evident only after we have attempted to write a story. Very frequently we find ourselves much in the position of the old man in the following incident:

"Does he ever scare?" I asked, when the old horse that was leisurely bringing us toward our destination pricked up his ears at an automobile which crossed our road a few hundred feet ahead.

"No," the old driver replied; "that is, only once. He scared last Sunday, but I don't think he'd do it again. It was like this: Old Cal Hughes's boy — do you know Cal? — Well, anyway, he lives about four miles over east

here; married Joe Brumage's daughter. He and the boy talked it over and concluded that the hill farm couldn't grow a livin' for both of 'em; so the boy said he'd go to town and see what he could find to do. He went over to Zanesville and worked around at odd jobs for a while, and at last got somethin' to do in the wagon factory over there. He did purty well, too, I think, — made good money; but one day last week while he was workin' around a circular saw he slipped on a wet board and struck his forehead square against the teeth. Killed him quick as lightnin', of course. Well, the boss telephoned down and told the old man a week ago to-night — yes, Friday night it was — and it looked for a time like we'd have to bury him and his wife with the boy. But the neighbors were all good to 'em, and that helped a little. They buried him on Sunday. In the mornin' about all the men he had worked with came down on the train to 'tend the funeral; and in the afternoon the boss himself came. He went right over to the house, just like one of the friends, and when they came to the church he headed the procession in his big automobile. I was comin' to the funeral, too, and met 'em just where you turn in to the church back there; and this horse — I was drivin' the same one — got scared when the automobile went rubblin' by. But that's the only time I ever knew him to scare at 'em."

On the other hand, one of the surest indications of a writer's mastery of his art and his material is his ability to see clearly through all the antecedent events to the first one which the reader must know in order to understand the story.

Furthermore, the writer must let the material help him to decide which point of view will afford him the most perfect opportunity to do his work well. Somebody must do the telling. It may be one of the characters, or it may be several of the characters, or it may be somebody quite outside the story. Of course there are times, in the writing of autobiography or biography, for example, when the material will lend itself to telling from only one point of view. Usually, however, the writer is confronted with the necessity of making a choice. In doing this, he will, to be sure, be guided in part by his personal preferences and limitations; but his chief guide will be the material.

Upon first thought it may appear that the person best fitted to relate events is the leading character in them. It would seem, then, that the most natural way to tell a story would be to write

it as if the hero were telling it; and there are some distinct advantages in this method whenever it can be employed. To begin with, a narrative in the first person contributes to the impression of reality. The story must be true, for do we not have the man before our very eyes? This advantage is recognized by practiced raconteurs, who overwhelm us with the variety of experience they have had "in Mexico," "out West," or "up in Alaska." A second clear advantage lies in the opportunity afforded the leading character to speak convincingly of his own mental experiences, especially such emotions as fear, joy, and expectancy. On the other hand, this point of view has some serious dangers. If the leading character is so busy that his own transactions provide us with the major part of the story, he probably does not have much time to devote to a study of secondary persons or events, however interesting they may be to the reader. Moreover, he cannot with propriety characterize himself fully; he would hesitate, perhaps, to speak either of his most grievous shortcomings or his greatest virtues. Furthermore, he stands always in danger of talking too much about his own deeds. "The seductive love of narrative," one of Scott's characters tells us, "when we ourselves are the heroes of the events which we tell, often disregards the attention due the time and the patience of the audience." Capital instances of stories written from this point of view are *Robinson Crusoe*, *David Copperfield*, *Oliver Twist*, *Rob Roy*, *Kidnapped*, *Treasure Island*, and *Jane Eyre*.

Sometimes when it is not advisable or possible to have the leading character tell the story, a minor character tells it. Stevenson's *The Master of Ballantrae*, Conan Doyle's *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, Poe's detective stories, and in a modified form, Edward Everett Hale's *The Man without a Country*, are typical of this method. Its chief advantages are three. It affords a good opportunity to characterize the leading person or persons in the story; it enables the narrator to use a greater fund of information about the different personages and events than the leading character probably would have or could secure;

and it precludes the hero from offending readers with much talk about himself. The danger is, of course, that since a minor character must ever remain minor, he may not have all essential information and he may not find it possible to move about to gain it without getting in his own way or magnifying his own importance.

The difficulty of having a minor character tell the story may sometimes be overcome by having different parts told by different characters. Thus when one character does not possess information that is essential, another may have it; or, if circumstances prevent one character from being in a given place when observations are to be noted or information is to be received, another who is there may very conveniently perform the part. The possibilities of writing from this point of view can be seen to advantage in Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* or his *Woman in White*, Kipling's *My Lord the Elephant*, or, of course, in any story written in the form of letters. The chief disadvantages of the method are that the many narrators may confuse the reader, and that the different approaches to the different parts of the story may destroy the unity of impression that the series of events, taken together, ought to produce.

Of course, in a large number of cases it is desirable to have the story told by some one quite outside the circle of characters. In such an event, it may be told from a simple external point of view such as any spectator might take, or from the position of one who assumes the omnipresence and the omniscience necessary to explain all things that the events themselves do not make thoroughly clear. The former method, — interestingly exemplified in Poe's *The Man of the Crowd*, — though infrequently used, is deserving of all respect. It is, in truth, one of the most genuinely artistic means employed in narration, in that it necessitates the selection of those events which are so significant that they suggest completely all the unseen, untold parts of the story. Its chief disadvantage rests in the fact that it is very difficult. It prevents the writer from telling what

people have thought or done, what they are thinking about, or what they mean to do, save as their past conduct, their thinking, and their intentions are manifested in the conduct which he sees.

Any review of a considerable number of narratives, however, will reveal the fact that the so-called omniscient point of view is chosen much more frequently than any other. The reason is at once evident: this point of view lends itself readily to a wide variety of temperaments and an equally wide variety of narrative material and narrative contingencies. If we wish to express our hero's inmost thoughts, we may do so with full liberty; if we find it necessary to give an account of any transaction that has fallen outside the experience or observation of any character competent to address the reader, we are free to give the account ourselves; or, if we choose to tell our readers, as Hawthorne did in *The Ambitious Guest*, that certain events took place and certain conversations were carried on in some very definite manner when as a matter of simple fact no one could possibly know whether these events and conversations ever took place at all, we may do so without incurring the displeasure of many readers or very many critics. In a marked way the writer who finds it advisable to tell a story from this point of view has his readers at an advantage. He takes his position on one side of the stage, marshals his characters, requests them to act, and whenever he deems it necessary, stops the performance until he has offered explanation or comment. He may even risk the audacity of Thackeray, though the risk is usually too great to be worth taking, and tell his readers that it will not hurt them in any way to enter into the full spirit of the events, inasmuch as everything he is telling them is mere story. In any case, we may feel sure that the aid we offer to the reader will be accepted if offered skillfully.

2. **Selection of events.** — When we have mastered our narrative material well enough to enable us to see the end clearly from the beginning, to determine where to take up the threads of the story, and to choose our point of view, we are ready to

begin the real work of recounting the events. Here, as in the initial steps of any other kind of endeavor that requires constructive skill, we are confronted at once with the problem of selection.

The first necessity of selection may be seen readily by reflecting upon the comparatively disjointed character of most that is said and done in everyday life. Any half dozen persons say enough and do enough in a day to fill a good-sized volume; but aside from the fact that most of these transactions would make supremely dull reading if printed under any circumstances, they do not, when standing together, constitute a logical narrative. Whether or not we have ever tried to formulate our conception of narrative skill, we have at least a vague notion that a story is not an exact transcript of life, but a series of selected incidents; and our conviction will become very definite if we try to record all the happenings that immediately affect one person in the course of a day. Just as we exercised selection in determining where to take up the threads of the story, so we must choose merely for the purpose of simplifying the narrative itself.

Moreover, it is necessary to select in order to bring out the significance of events. In our daily life we wind our watches, put on our eyeglasses, carry umbrellas, open doors, remove our hats, and do scores of other things important in their way without making any fully conscious effort; we do them through mere force of habit. Now in the relevant material of any narrative, there are always events that correspond to these routine parts of our lives; and, especially after the story is well under way, the reader does not care to be troubled with them. They are taken for granted. To give them attention, except in unusual instances, would not only be misleading but would destroy the appearance of life — the truthfulness of narrative — by attaching significance to matters that ordinarily are not significant.

The exclusion of these things, however, is only negative selection. We must go further and make it positive by lifting the central events of the story above those which are merely preparatory or contributory. The writer has done this work well

only when out of all the events with which his raw material has provided him, he has enabled the reader to behold a series of situations that are closely related through cause and effect and intensified by the spirit of some one motive. The matter is clearly expressed in the oft-quoted words of Stevenson:

"Let him choose a motive, whether of character or of passion; carefully construct his plot so that every incident is an illustration of the motive, and every property employed shall bear to it a near relation of congruity or contrast; avoid a sub-plot unless, as sometimes in Shakespeare, the sub-plot be a reversion or complement of the main intrigue; . . . and allow neither himself in the narrative nor any character in the course of the dialogue, to utter one sentence that is not part and parcel of the business of the story or the discussion of the problem involved. . . . Let him not care particularly if he miss the tone of conversation, the pungent material detail of the day's manners, the reproduction of the atmosphere and the environment. These elements are not essential: a novel may be excellent, and yet have none of them; a passion or a character is so much the better depicted as it rises clearer from material circumstance. . . . And as the root of the whole matter, let him bear in mind that his novel is not a transcript of life, to be judged by its exactitude; but a simplification of some side or point of life, to stand or fall by its significant simplicity." [1]

The influence of motive may readily be seen in forms of narration where selection, except to exclude wholly extraneous matter, is not regarded as legitimate. For example, in the narrative parts of history we demand as full a representation of the events as the writer can produce. How unfair the result is if he allows himself through prejudice to suppress any considerable part of a transaction may be seen in the many distorted accounts of the Civil War or in the histories of political parties or political campaigns. Courts recognize the tremendous results of selection when they insist that a witness tell not only the truth, but the whole truth. They know that selected truth may contribute

[1] *A Humble Remonstrance.*

to an impression which all the truth taken together would not produce.

Now when we attempt to select events not to mislead, but to meet the demands of good narrative art, the process always requires exacting care. To our dying day we are encountering the problem which confronted us as children when we were sternly requested to leave out parts of the tale and come to the point at once. Even such giants as Cervantes and Fielding let the story of the Impertinent and the history of the Man from the Hill find space in their masterpieces.

3. **Treatment of events.** — The events which we select to tell our story must be so ordered and treated that they will make for continuous progress. All of us have read short stories and novels, as well as histories and biographies, in which we are made to feel that the writer's own awkwardness has driven him to say to us, "Please stand here for a time, or walk back a distance with me after some material that I have left, and then we shall move on again." In the narratives told in daily conversation, this awkwardness is expressed in such apologies as "I meant to say," "I forgot to say," and "Oh yes, I left one thing out." Of course the progress of the story need not be uniform. At times it may be rapid, at times slow. The writer may cover a week in a chapter, in a paragraph, in a sentence, or in a single word; but movement there must be. And only the writer's eternal watchfulness and the employment of all his knowledge of the principles of narrative structure, his artistic feeling, and his common sense will enable him to determine how it can best be made. Still, careful planning of the large divisions of the narrative and conscientious effort to render transitions from event to event as unobtrusive as possible will go far in making the progress continuous. If the narrative is well planned, the persons, the scene, and the purpose of one event will make the next one inevitable; and if transitions are skillful, cause and effect will seem to be one with chronology.

Furthermore, the events must be so treated that time will seem to pass naturally. Not only must the entire period seem

long enough for the completion of all the transactions of the narrative, but within this period the allotment of time to each event must be justified by its significance. It is not necessary for the writer to speak to the reader in terms of days or hours or minutes, but he must create an impression that time has passed or is passing. Our study of Shakespeare gives us some good examples of the skill with which this may be done. Only occasionally do his plays contain specific reference to the exact period of time that has passed — in fact, a close study of the time element will reveal many inaccuracies — yet we rarely fail to receive the impression that the passing of time is natural. This impression, apart from the handling of conversation and description, concerning which more will be said later, is chiefly a matter of proportion. He who can cause an unimportant week to pass in one suggestive word or make an important hour seem short in twenty or thirty pages of lively narrative detail is well on the way to a solution of this difficult problem.

Again, the ordering of events must produce suspense and climax, without which the story would be uninteresting and pointless. Events are cumulative; so too are the complications which grow out of events. Every time we add a new character to a story, all the characters previously introduced are influenced; and their relation to him modifies to some degree their relation to one another. As the story progresses, as all the threads are gathered up, this increased complexity of relation, together with the slackened movement that necessarily results from it, produces suspense by making it impossible for the reader to see the outcome that is most logical where there are so many possibilities. Put simply, he does not know whether the end will be favorable to the hero, his rival, or some humbler person who is just becoming prominent in the story. The writer, if successful, has brought him to the state of mind recommended in the final clause of the much-discussed sentence, "Make 'em laugh; make 'em cry; make 'em wait." But the interest created through suspense must not be abused; the reader must not wait too long, and he must not be too much disappointed in the outcome of the com-

plications. It is necessary, therefore, for the writer to treat the events so that cause and effect will culminate in a final situation that affords artistic justice for all the characters. This impression of consistency, reality, artistic justice, is produced very largely by the fact that the culmination of the story is the unmistakable, inevitable result of the preceding events. Every event, in itself as interesting as possible, has contributed to the total effect.

4. **Handling of conversation.** — Thus far we have considered only what is usually called straightforward narrative. Nothing has been said about the part that conversation contributes to action. It is true — perhaps unfortunately true — that in much narration there is comparatively little conversation; and it is likewise true, as we shall see later, that conversation contributes to character portrayal as well as to action. Nevertheless, it is so important to the action of the story that we must not overlook it here.

Dialogue may be used very effectively to suggest the action that preceded the opening of the story, — the antecedent action. Of course, the writer may explain by direct means what has taken place; but the expository introduction is passing out of use. In its stead custom has adopted a method that the drama, through force of the limitations of stage production, has long used. Although the time-worn device of having two or three servants give us the antecedent action of the play while they are dusting the chairs or preparing a meal has been much modified, the principle remains unchanged; and the story-writer has discovered that he can use it. It is almost invariably better art, he has found, to let the reader learn than it is to tell him flatly. This indirect means of giving the necessary explanation of the story, though difficult, is almost always practicable and is usually convincing. Note, for example, how easily we understand what has preceded the opening of Stevenson's *Olalla* as soon as the doctor speaks:

"Now," said the doctor, "my part is done, and, I may say with some vanity, well done. It remains only to get you out of this cold and poisonous city, and to give you two months of a pure air and an easy conscience."

Note, too, how we gain a different kind of information in the opening dialogue in *Tess of the D' Urbervilles*. While the parson is telling Durbeyfield that he is really a member of the family of D'Urbervilles, we are gaining the information which gives significance to all of Tess's later conduct.

"Good-night t'ye," said the man with the basket.

"Good-night, Sir John," said the parson.

The pedestrian, after another pace or two, halted, and turned around.

"Now, sir, begging your pardon, we met last market-day on this road about this time, and I said 'Good-night,' and you made reply, 'Good-night, Sir John,' as now."

"I did," said the parson.

"And once before that — near a month ago."

"I may have."

"Then what might your meaning be in calling me 'Sir John' these different times, when I be plain Jack Durbeyfield, the haggler?"

The parson rode a step or two nearer.

"It was only my whim," he said; and, after a moment's hesitation: "it was on account of a discovery I made some little time ago, whilst I was hunting up pedigrees for the new county history. I am Parson Tringham, the antiquary, of Stagfoot Lane. Don't you really know, Durbeyfield, that you are the lineal representative of the ancient and knightly family of the D'Urbervilles, who derive their descent from Sir Pagan D'Urberville, that renowned knight who came from Normandy with William the Conqueror, as appears by Battle Abbey Roll?"

"Never heard it before, sir."

"Well, it's true. Throw up your chin a moment, so that I may catch the profile of your face better. Yes, that's the D'Urberville nose and chin — a little debased." [1]

Conversation is much more frequently used, however, to advance the action when the story is once under way. How natural a means it is may easily be seen in the part it holds in the daily narratives of actual life. It is possible to gain a very complete story by listening to the dialogue of two friends for ten minutes; it is even possible to catch all the outlines of a story in the few dozen words spoken by two persons as they pass us on the street; and it is not wholly impossible to grasp some of the significant events by hearing only one side of the dialogue, as

[1] Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, p. 1 f. Harper and Brothers.

in listening to a person who is talking over the telephone. The method, therefore, lends itself readily to the requirements of written narrative. In fact, almost every good story we read is in some degree an example of narration by means of conversation.

Naturalness, however, is produced not only by the conversation itself, but by the variety which results from alternating conversation and the direct recounting of events. No rule will aid a student in determining how long the stretches of dialogue and passages of direct narration ought to be; but if he will observe how the conversation of the world is really carried on, or study the proportion of dialogue to directly expressed incident in the masterpieces of fiction, he will find that neither ought to reach continuously over many pages. The examination of a few skillfully written stories will reveal the fact, too, that no break in the action occurs at the juncture of these alternating parts. They almost imperceptibly shade into one another, the conversation leading up to the directly expressed incident, and the incident preparing the way for the conversation.

B. Character Portrayal

1. The relation of character and action. — In studying character, the second element of narration, we soon discover that action and character are so thoroughly interdependent that they cannot really be separated. Once more it becomes evident that classifications in the study of any art are usually mere conveniences; they do not necessarily indicate natural lines. Thus action is almost invariably a part of character delineation, and character, on the other hand, is the "mainspring of all action." "What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?"[1] Nevertheless, we shall know more about both character and action if for the time being we attempt to consider character as a thing apart.

[1] Henry James, The Art of Fiction, in *Partial Portraits*. The Macmillan Company.

2. **The difference between character development and character portrayal.** — At the outset, one thought must be fixed clearly in mind: we are to study character portrayal, not character development. These terms are not convertible. Character development requires a series of snapshots representing an entire life, or, if not that, the steps leading up to a crisis in life. That is to say, it involves the whole duty of the story-teller, and cannot be studied except with the many concrete events essential to its own existence. Character portrayal, on the other hand, though oftentimes a difficult matter, is a simpler process, requiring chiefly close observation, a degree of sympathy, and some skill in expression. It may, therefore, be studied in itself with profit.

3. **Direct characterization.** — It would seem at once that the least difficult way to reveal character would be through a direct explanation of a person's qualities. For example, in characterizing a friend it might appear sufficient to say of him: "He is honest, frank, agreeable to deal with, loyal to his friends, and earnest in the pursuit of scholarship." In this direct way John Richard Green wrote one of the most famous characterizations in English, — that of Queen Elizabeth. Aside from the danger of tediousness, the shortcomings of the method lie chiefly in the possibility that the writer has not interpreted the concrete facts as we should have interpreted them, or that his conception of the terms which he uses in making the generalizations may be different from ours. For instance, when some one says that Mr. Smith is "honest, religious, and a reader of good literature," we can have only an indefinite notion of Mr. Smith's qualities unless we know the speaker's standards of honesty, his conception of religion, and his literary tastes. Nevertheless, most words have enough of the same general meaning for different people to enable one to gain something from characterizations of this kind; and when they are done with superior skill they are effective.

4. **Indirect characterization.** — If, however, in actual life we wish to understand the character of a man, we are not con-

tent to learn of his qualities through explanation, but resort to other means: we study his personal appearance, we listen to his conversation, we observe his conduct, we note his influence on his associates, we compare or contrast him with other persons, we regard the environment which he has created for himself or in which he seems most comfortable, and we sometimes even permit ourselves to be influenced to a degree by his name. These ways, which are generally accepted in business and in social intercourse, ought, then, to give life and color and naturalness to narration that has been reduced to writing.

The first, characterization through personal appearance, is not far removed from the character exposition which we have already considered. It is one of the most frequently used of the indirect means, yet one of the least conclusive. All of us know by experience how untrustworthy it sometimes is; we remember that the cold, unpleasant-looking man whom we passed daily on the street was one of the best fellows in the world when we came to know him. The efficacy of the method depends upon the individuality of the person described and the degree of his self-consciousness. If his appearance is not unusual, if he seems to belong to a common type, the impression that we gain from his appearance is likely to be indefinite, and it may be wholly wrong. If, on the other hand, his features are striking or his dress extreme, his appearance may serve as a good index to his character. Thus because Dickens's characterizations usually approach caricature, this method was well suited to his needs.

Bill Sikes:

> A stoutly-built fellow of about five-and-thirty, in a black velveteen coat, very soiled drab breeches, laced-up half boots, and gray cotton stockings, which inclosed a very bulky pair of legs, with large swelling calves; the kind of legs, that in such a costume, always look in an unfinished and incomplete state without a set of fetters to garnish them. He had a brown hat on his head, and a dirty Belcher handkerchief round his neck; with the long frayed ends of which he smeared the beer from his face as he spoke; disclosing, when he had done so, a broad heavy countenance with a beard of three days' growth, and two scowling eyes, one of which displayed various parti-colored symptoms of having been recently damaged by a blow.

Micawber:

He was a stoutish, middle-aged person, in a brown surtout and black tights and shoes, with no more hair upon his head (which was a large one, and very shining) than there is upon an egg, and with a very extensive face, which he turned full upon me. His clothes were shabby, but he had an imposing shirt-collar on. He carried a jaunty sort of a stick, with a large pair of rusty tassels to it; and a quizzing-glass hung outside his coat, — for ornament, I afterwards found, as he very seldom looked through it, and couldn't see anything when he did.

The skill with which Thackeray sometimes employed this means of characterization may be seen in the following description of Beatrix:

She was a brown beauty: that is, her eyes, hair, and eyebrows and eyelashes were dark: her hair curling with rich undulations, and waving over her shoulders; but her complexion was as dazzling white as snow in sunshine: except her cheeks, which were a bright red, and her lips, which were of a still deeper crimson. Her mouth and chin, they said, were too large and full, and so they might be for a goddess in marble, but not for a woman whose eyes were fire, whose look was love, whose voice was the sweetest low song, whose shape was perfect symmetry, health, decision, activity, whose foot as it planted itself on the ground was firm but flexible, and whose motion, whether rapid or slow, was always perfect grace — agile as a nymph, lofty as a queen — now melting, now imperious, now sarcastic — there was no single movement of hers but was beautiful.[1]

No limit can be placed upon the length of a characterization of this kind, but the mere glimpse that the writer gives in a few lines is often more convincing than the full-length portrait that occupies all of a well-rounded paragraph. The shorter characterization leaves the reader free to supply the details from his own experience. Study these two examples:

She was a blooming lass of fresh eighteen, plump as a partridge, ripe and melting and rosy-cheeked as one of her father's peaches![2]

For it was pleasant to look at Romola's beauty; to see her, like old Firenzuola's type of womanly majesty, "sitting with a certain grandeur, speaking with gravity, smiling with modesty, and casting around, as it were,

[1] *Henry Esmond*, Book II, Chap. VI.
[2] Irving, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*.

an odor of queenliness"; and she seemed to unfold like a strong white lily under this genial breath of admiration and homage.[1]

It is significant that the most famous characterization by Dickens, skilled as he was in detailed description, is only a line long:

In came Mrs. Fezziwig, one vast substantial smile.[2]

But more convincing than a person's appearance, though perhaps less easily employed, is what he says and does. Sometimes, if he is thoroughly on his guard, he may succeed in producing a false impression through his appearance; but the moment he opens his mouth, either about himself or others, or permits himself to be off guard in even a seemingly insignificant action, he reveals his true self. Thus speech and action, because they are normally a direct expression of one's inmost life, become powerful expedients in the hands of the narrator. As an example of the use of speech alone, we might study George Eliot's account of the family council in Book III, Chapter III, of *The Mill on the Floss*, or the opening chapter of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. As an example of the use of action alone we can well afford to study the entire career of Becky Sharp in *Vanity Fair*. Even her conduct as she leaves Miss Pinkerton's school gives us a glimpse of the real Becky:

"Stop!" cried Miss Jemima, rushing to the gate with a parcel.

"It's some sandwiches, my dear," said she to Amelia. "You may be hungry, you know; and Becky, Becky Sharp, here's a book for you that my sister — that is, I — Johnson's Dixonary, you know; you mustn't leave us without that. Good-by. Drive on, coachman. God bless you!"

And the kind creature retreated into the garden, overcome with emotion.

But, lo! and just as the coach drove off, Miss Sharp put her pale face out of the window, and actually flung the book back into the garden.

As an example in which conversation and action support each other we might study the career of Colonel Newcome in *The*

[1] George Eliot, *Romola*, Book I, Chap. XIX.

[2] *A Christmas Carol*.

Newcomes. As a brief example, let us look at the following from Mr. Hamlin Garland's *Up the Coolly:*

When Grant came in at noon Mrs. McLane met him at the door with a tender smile on her face.

"Where's Howard, Grant?"

"I don't know," he replied, in a tone that implied "I don't care."

The dim eyes clouded with quick tears.

"Ain't you seen him?"

"Not since nine o'clock."

"Where do you think he is?"

"I tell yeh I don't know. He'll take care of himself; don't worry."

He flung off his hat and plunged into the washbasin. His shirt was wet with sweat and covered with dust of the hay and fragments of leaves. He splashed his burning face with the water, paying no further attention to his mother. She spoke again, very gently, in reproof:

"Grant, why do you stand out against Howard so?"

"I don't stand out against him," he replied harshly, pausing with the towel in his hands. His eyes were hard and piercing. "But if he expects me to gush over his coming back, he's fooled, that's all. He's left us to paddle our own canoe all this while, and, so far as *I'm* concerned, he can leave us alone hereafter. He looked out for his precious hide mighty well, and now he comes back here to play big gun and pat us on the head. I don't propose to let him come that over me."

Grant had come in from his work, and with his feet released from his chafing boots, in his wet shirt and milk-splashed overalls, sat at the kitchen table reading a newspaper which he held close to a small kerosene lamp. He paid no attention to any one. His attitude, curiously like his father's, was perfectly definite to Howard. It meant that from that time forward there were to be no words of any sort between them. It meant that they were no longer brothers, not even acquaintances. "How inexorable that face!" thought Howard.

He turned sick with disgust and despair, and would have closed his trunk without showing any of the presents, only for the childish expectancy of his mother and Laura.

"Here's something for you, mother," he said, assuming a cheerful voice, as he took a fold of fine silk from the trunk and held it up. "All the way from Paris." He laid it on his mother's lap and stooped and kissed her, and then turned hastily away to hide the tears that came to his own eyes as he saw her keen pleasure.

"And here's a parasol for Laura. I don't know how I came to have that

in here. And here's General Grant's autobiography for his namesake," he said, with an effort of carelessness, and waited to hear Grant rise.

"Grant, won't you come in?" asked his mother, quaveringly.

Grant did not reply nor move. Laura took the handsome volumes out and laid them beside him on the table. He simply pushed them to one side and went on with his reading.[1]

Characterizing a person by showing the influence he exerts upon others is an expedient closely related to the "description by effects" which we studied in the preceding chapter. Although such a method may seem to be artificial, we may frequently see the basis of it in actual life. It is not difficult to tell when a well-known person enters a concert hall or theater by the expression of pleasure or displeasure on the faces of those who have already assembled; it is not much more difficult to estimate the character of the person at the other end of the telephone line by the manner in which the busy man talks to him; and it is quite possible to form some notion of the character of our fellow beings on a street car if we simply observe the miraculous change of expression on the face of some man who watches them enter. In literature we may see this method employed effectively in *The House of the Seven Gables*, where we learn of Judge Pyncheon's qualities through his influence upon Phœbe. Another excellent example is in Blackmore's *Lorna Doone*. When Jan met the handsome lady and she looked at him "very kindly," he took off his cap, he tells us, "without asking wherefore." Likewise in *Treasure Island*, we distrust Blind Pew because of the effect he produces upon those about him, especially the Captain.

Character portrayal by contrast consists in bringing personages that are very unlike into such close relation that the differences in their appearance, their speech, their conduct, or their influence on their associates stand out sharply. The principle of contrast, important in any kind of writing, is strikingly effective in characterization. Iago recognized its strength when he contemplated the death of Cassio:

[1] Published in *Main Travelled Roads*. Harper and Brothers.

> If Cassio do remain,
> He hath a daily beauty in his life
> That makes me ugly;[1]

Experienced story-writers and playwrights are constantly alert for opportunities to bring character contrast into use; and the great novels attest its efficacy. In *Tom Jones* we have Tom and Blifil; in *The Mill on the Floss*, Tom and Maggie, as well as Tom and Philip; in *Adam Bede*, Seth and Adam and Dinah and Hetty; in *Vanity Fair*, Amelia and Becky, as well as George and Dobbin. Nothing is better established in the art of story-writing than this principle.

Probably the most difficult means of characterization is that of revealing the person's qualities by setting forth his habitual environment. This expedient is infrequently used, not only because it is difficult under any circumstances, but because the range of circumstances in which it is at all possible is very narrow. Nevertheless, like other difficult artistic means, it is singularly pleasing when employed skillfully. It is as if we were to take a reader into a carelessly kept room and say, "Don't you know the kind of student who lives here?" or to point out an attractive farm and ask, "Can't you guess what kind of farmer lives over there?" or to say of some isolated village in the hills, "Living there would make any man go to sleep; so you know the kind of man Charley is now at sixty." Easily and incidentally the reader gains the information necessary to an understanding of the character.

If we but reflect upon the tremendous influence of a name, we must see at once the importance of using names as means of characterization. Of course, in real life we overlook the unpleasantness or the attractiveness of a name after we learn that it does not fit the person to whom it is applied; we know that he was not responsible for the inconsistency, and that his parents were not responsible for at least a part of it. But in the life of fiction we scarcely forgive an author who deliberately misnames one of his characters; and, it might be added, we scarcely cease

[1] *Othello*, Act V, Scene I, 18–20.

praising him if he names all of them well. Stevenson, who always named his own characters appropriately, admired Heywood for his touch of names: "He had obviously been present, and heard Purser and Clinton take death by the beard with similar braggadocios. Purser and Clinton, names of pirates; Scarlet and Bobbington, names of highwaymen. He had the touch of names, I think. No man I ever knew had such a sense, such a tact, for English nomenclature; Rainsforth, Lacy, Audley, Forrest, Acton, Spencer, Frankford — so his names run." [1]

Still, it should not be understood that a character is necessarily misnamed when his name is wholly out of keeping with his dominant personal characteristics, his social standing, or his intellectual attainments; the author sometimes seeks to make the contrast between name and person so great that the effect is humorous. Mark Twain's Electra and Clytemnestra, the wife and daughter of a bookkeeper, appeal to us in this way. But ordinarily, where the purpose of the writer is not solely humorous, there must be a fitness of name and person. To be sure, the name ought not to be a mere advertising label. Jingle, Mutanhed, Sowerberry, M'Choakumchild, Tite Barnacle, Podsnap, Brass, and Muzzle may be permissible in Dickens, but they do not represent the highest art. The names that are actually employed in everyday life afford a sufficiently great source from which to draw.

5. **The twofold problem in character portrayal.** — These different means of character delineation are rarely employed separately. Although every writer doubtless has some favorite method which he uses more frequently than any other, he learns sooner or later that he must resort to every expedient he can bring to bear. In his efforts he is usually confronted by two problems. The first of these is to prevent his point of view from rendering some of the means of characterization impracticable. If he is telling his story in the first person, for instance, he cannot very well have the hero say what he himself is like, unless he does so quite incidentally. The second problem is to make the

[1] A letter to W. E. Henley. *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*. Scribner's.

characters consistent. In other words, when an author has told us that the hero possesses a smooth temper, this admirable quality ought to be further exemplified in his facial expression, in his speech, in his conduct, in his influence on his associates, in the environment which he creates for himself, and, when it is possible to control the matter, even in his name. Readers are entitled to expect that every part of the narrative will contribute to the first impression they received when they made the character's acquaintance.

C. Setting

1. The function of the setting. — Action and character constitute the chief part of the writing of narration. Nevertheless, significant events participated in by characters who convince us of their reality are not always sufficient to create the deepest impression of truth. The transactions must have a setting; that is, we must feel that they have happened at the right time in the right place. All that is suggested by the synonymous terms "local color," "background," and "environment" is included in the term "setting." It usually embraces not only the general period of time, but the season of the year, and if the exigencies of the narrative demand it, a suggestion of the time of day; not only the general suggestion of the place of the action, but the immediate locality. The impression of truth will probably be rendered still more definite if such circumstances as social standards and the spirit of the community life are made to serve the writer's purpose. Considered less generally, the function of setting is threefold: it should "realize" the action; it should influence or justify character; and it should largely determine tone or atmosphere.

In the older stories in English literature there seemed to be a very slight relation between the events and many of the places described. In truth, a full confession from readers would probably disclose a general repugnance to these descriptive parts. The reader omits them because they are obviously unrelated to

the action in which they are found. And this very attitude doubtless helps to account for the effort of present-day writers to produce a more vital relation between setting and action. They have come to see that putting events in a very definite time and place increases the clearness and vividness of all the action by giving it the kind of background with which events in real life are inseparably associated. Stevenson's experience is the universal experience of the age:

"One thing in life calls for another; there is a fitness in events and places. The sight of a pleasant arbour puts it in our mind to sit there. One place suggests work, another idleness, a third early rising and long rambles in the dew. The effect of night, of any flowing water, of lighted cities, of the peep of day, of ships, of the open ocean, calls up in the mind an army of anonymous desires and pleasures. Something, we feel, should happen; we know not what, yet we proceed in quest of it. And many of the happiest hours of life fleet by us in this vain attendance on the genius of the place and moment. It is thus that tracts of young fir, and low rocks that reach into deep soundings, particularly torture and delight me. Something must have happened in such places, and perhaps ages back, to members of my race; and when I was a child I tried in vain to invent appropriate games for them, as I still try, just as vainly, to fit them with the proper story."[1]

The setting should further serve to make a narrative truthful by justifying the character of the persons who participate in the action. That is to say, the relation that exists between a person and his chosen surroundings should be utilized to give consistency to the entire narrative. Thus, for instance, Bret Harte's stories seem true very largely because his characters are perfectly at home in the Western mining camp of 1855 or 1860. Some writers go even further and make the setting the one dominating influence. It thus not only harmonizes with the characters, but influences them vitally or controls them absolutely. In Thomas Hardy's stories, for example, the setting

[1] Stevenson, *A Gossip on Romance.*

is the fate that determines their outcome. Tess, in *Tess of the D' Urbervilles*, is driven through her tragic life by the environment of her youth almost as helplessly as if she possessed no will at all.

The setting may, however, reveal itself only in what is rather indefinitely called atmosphere or tone. In this case the material things which constitute the setting do not influence the action of the characters directly, but induce in the reader a frame of mind that causes the action to take on new significance. Thus in Hawthorne's stories the hollow mountain sides, the maniacal laugh in the night, the oppressive silence of Gallows Hill, the shrieking of the winter blast, and the glowing light of the isolated lime kiln affect the reader much more than they seem to affect the characters in the story. Poe's tales, although very different from Hawthorne's, influence us in a similar manner. The fear which overtakes us and sends us timidly to bed after we have read *Usher* or *Berenice* late at night is not the fear which we suffer in sympathy with the persons in the stories, but rather that which comes directly to us from the author's suggestion of quietly swinging curtains at midnight, low, indefinite sounds, the " unceasing radiation of gloom " from melancholy men, and the horrifying thought of being buried alive. For the hour, we live in a sunless atmosphere that makes even the most cheerful objects dark and uncertain.

2. **The handling of the setting.** — It is not difficult to see that setting is made perfect chiefly through description. Through description the reader will gain most of his information as to the place where the events occur, the time, and the circumstances. Nevertheless, the student must not think that these directly descriptive parts are sufficient to make the setting complete. Furthermore, he cannot always stop the story long enough to offer description. He must, therefore, know how to suggest setting in other ways. He must know, for instance, how to employ conduct and conversation to this end. Through them the reader can learn many things about the circumstances of the story that would impede the action seriously if written out

in direct description. Again, the action itself may be made to carry much information about its setting. When, for example, we say, " The stranger walked through the grove of oaks to the cheerful cottage of his old friend," we know without further explanation or description that a grove of oaks and a cheerful cottage constituted a part of the setting of the transaction. If we turn once more to the good counsel of one who knew well how to write narration, we shall find a valuable suggestion concerning the point: " I remember Bob once saying to me that the quadrangle of Edinburgh University was a good thing and our having a talk as to how it could be employed in different arts. I then stated that the different doors and staircases ought to be brought before a reader of a story not by mere recapitulation, but by the use of them, by the descent of different people one after another by each of them. And that grand feature of shadow and the light of one lamp in the corner should also be introduced only as they enabled people in the story to see one another or prevented them. And finally that whatever could not thus be worked into the evolution of the action had no right to be commemorated at all. After all, it is a story you are telling; not a place you are to describe; and everything that does not attach itself to the story is out of place." [1]

III. EFFECTIVENESS IN NARRATION

In the preceding divisions of the chapter we have studied the elements common to both kinds of narration, although as was pointed out at the beginning, the more complex kind, the æsthetic, has served as the chief basis of the study. This analytic study, though necessary to an understanding of narrative structure, is not in itself sufficient. We must, then, give our attention for a short time to some specific applications of narrative principles and learn, if possible, what makes for effectiveness in the two kinds of narrative art.

[1] Stevenson, A letter to Sidney Colvin. *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson.* Charles Scribner's Sons.

A. Effectiveness in Instrumental Narration

What are some of the qualities especially required by effective instrumental narration? What, for example, are some of the marks of a good biography? In brief, we may say that inasmuch as its chief purpose is to give information, its effectiveness is measured by the accuracy with which the facts and the spirit of the facts are represented. The materials are provided, and the beginning and the end are fixed. It remains, then, for the writer, after he has become thoroughly familiar with his subject-matter, to select from the richness of his knowledge such incidents as will reveal fully and justly the life of his subject, and to recount these as clearly and interestingly as possible.

In order to arrive at the greatest accuracy, the writer of instrumental narrative must bring himself into full sympathy with the spirit of the events which he is to record. If he is preparing to write a biography, he cannot regard himself as ready until he has caught the significance, the aims, of his subject's life, and is able to interpret conduct in the light of these aims. We are provided to-day with many professedly "true" lives of men which are as false as those written by the blindest and most zealous of hero-worshipers, simply because the writers' prejudices preclude an interpretation of events that is favorable to the persons about whom they write. To allow oneself to be thus prejudiced against a subject makes reasonable interpretation impossible. It is doubtful whether any person is justified in writing a biography of a man or a woman whom he hates. Unquestionably the first qualification of the historian or biographer is a sympathetic, open mind.

The second is a reconstructive imagination, — the kind of imagination which when supplied with the seemingly unrelated events of a man's life or of a period in history, can bring them together, provide the obvious missing details, and give the record completeness. The power to do this is as truly imaginative as the power to make combinations that are wholly new; and its employment is frequently just as fruitful. The writer

who employs it does the same kind of valuable service that the student of Grecian architecture renders when he supplies the missing parts of an unearthed building and thereby transforms a ruin into a temple. The caution we need observe is that there is a difference between an imagination that supplies, that completes, that illuminates, adhering all the while to definite knowledge, and one that disencumbers itself of all fact. This latter kind will contribute to tradition, swell the volume of apocryphal anecdotes, and produce "cherry-tree histories," but it will not result in anything more creditable.

The writer of instrumental narrative must, moreover, consider a number of practical matters connected with the presentation of his material. He must be able, if necessity demands, to use conversation for variety and an impression of reality. He must know how to make the setting, the real background with which his material provides him, contribute to greater clearness and interest. He must know, too, how to eliminate the trivial without missing the small but suggestive details that are full of the spirit of the life he treats. Again, he should master the art of self-effacement if he wishes to write biography or history, and of self-subordination if he wishes to write autobiography. We want the facts, not the writer's account of what the facts ought to be or might be. Furthermore, he must give real structure to the series of events he deals with; that is, he must not let himself fall into a merely enumerative order in which incidents are strung promiscuously on a chronological frame. Finally, he must give full emphasis to the more deeply significant parts of the narrative. There must be adequate treatment of "those essential facts which underlie the life and make the individual man." [1]

B. Effectiveness in Æsthetic or Fictional Narration

In fictional narrative, effectiveness is in many ways a different matter. The writer is not striving to reproduce actual events,

[1] Lowell, *Keats*.

though actual events may be employed, but rather to produce the impression of actual events; and between the two there is a great difference. For instance, the unusual, perhaps the seemingly impossible, is accepted as "truth that is stranger than fiction" when it is known to be a trustworthy account of a real event. Let us consider an example:

> Several Union soldiers in a little town a distance north of the Mason and Dixon Line were not long ago recounting their experience as prisoners of war. A Confederate soldier who had lived in the town since the early seventies, but had been completely ostracized because he was a "Reb," chanced to be standing near the corner of the public square where they were assembled, and overheard one of them tell how he was captured one night and locked up in a log jail in Virginia to await his transportation to Libby or Andersonville; how he was left in charge of one Confederate soldier; how they became confidential in their midnight conversation; how he told his guard of his young wife and aged mother at home; how he begged to be granted his freedom; and finally, how the guard offered to let him make his escape on condition that he, the guard, might have one chance shot at him in the dark as he ran. When the narrator had finished, the Confederate joined the little group and said: "I am the man who turned you loose. And when you ran, I fired my old musket straight up in the air." Immediately he was made a permanent member of the group.

Now this is an account of facts. In a literal sense it is true. But a fictional story depending for its significance upon any such accidental truth would scarcely convince anyone. Although the whole world of experience is story material, stories make their primary appeal to fitness, to taste, and these usually demand not the abnormal or the unusual, but the universal experience of mankind.

The writer must always give serious attention to finding the raw material for his stories. He must make a special application of all that we learned in an earlier chapter about material. He must ask himself, What has been my most interesting experience? What kind of life do I know most about? What are my tastes? What is my temperament? What can I best do? And his success will depend in no small measure upon the wisdom with which he answers these questions. He

will not go far afield in his search, for the best material is that which the writer knows best. The world of romance is not off in some other country or even in some other state, but immediately at hand. It is worthy of note that within the last half century, the American stories that have interested readers most widely and most permanently are stories of small areas of the country by writers who knew these areas well. Bret Harte has written about the Far West; Hamlin Garland, the Northwest; George W. Cable, Louisiana; Thomas Nelson Page and Mary Johnston, Virginia; and Mary Wilkins Freeman, as well as Sarah Orne Jewett, New England. Many others scarcely less well known have found in a similar way that the best material is near at hand. One of these, who has for several years been interesting a considerable part of the English-reading world, has found the material for her books in a comparatively small part of one county; and she feels certain that the little community still possesses enough that is worth while to keep her busy as long as she lives.

But even the best incident is not immediately fit for the story-writer's purpose. Students of narration are constantly forgetting that an event is not necessarily suited to their purpose simply because at one time it actually occurred. As was pointed out in Chapter II, material requires the transforming touch of the constructive imagination; it must be made to lend itself to new combinations. That is to say, the interesting incident that you have observed must, perhaps, be modified slightly by adding or substituting parts of other incidents which you have drawn from some other experience; the qualities of some striking character whom you have known must be blended with those of some other who possesses qualities demanded by the story; and the setting that for years has been waiting for a story must be altered here and there before it will lend its magic spell.

In treating the material, certain things are absolutely essential. Chief among these is a vigorous, interesting beginning. Anyone who has taught narrative composition or who has se-

riously attempted to write stories knows how difficult it is, even when the events of the story have been decided upon, to go, as one always should, directly to the business of telling what one has to say. Professor Wendell puts the matter strikingly: "Most people have a very strong impulse to preface something in particular by at least a paragraph of nothing in particular, bearing to the real matter in hand a relation not more inherently intimate than that of the tuning of violins to a symphony. It is the mechanical misfortune of musicians that they cannot with certainty tune their instruments out of hearing. It is the mechanical luck of the writer that he need not show a bit more of his work than he chooses." [1] Not long ago when a publisher in this country undertook the publication of a story by a practiced writer who is well known to most readers to-day, he struck out the first three chapters, and the beginning was still sufficiently explanatory. Such a case is, of course, somewhat unusual, but it should help to impress upon the uninitiated the importance of guarding against a danger that often threatens the most experienced.

Of equal importance is a skillful ending. We have seen in our consideration of action that the chief purpose of a narrative is to present all the threads so clearly, so characteristically, that the reader will be encouraged to press on eagerly to the great, final event which marks the crushing down of all the obstacles standing in the way of the favored forces of the story. We have seen, too, that although the threads or currents of events converge in one final event, they are not, in fact, summarily broken off, but must go on indefinitely. Now the problem of the end lies in assuring the reader very subtly that the pursuit of any character's destiny beyond the last page of the story is not worth while. In other words, the illusion of reality must not be destroyed too soon, yet the reader must feel that the complications which were of real significance have been untangled and that the story is, therefore, artistically complete. Sometimes this vexatious problem may be solved by giving a brief summary of

[1] Barrett Wendell, *English Composition*, p. 167. Charles Scribner's Sons.

the left-over threads of the story, as in *Pendennis*. Sometimes the writer takes upon himself the responsibility of breaking the illusion for us by carrying us back to the causes or circumstances which led to the telling of the story, as in Guy de Maupassant's *La Mère Sauvage*. Less frequently, but more skillfully, he prepares the way for the climax so deftly and with such sureness that we are borne irresistibly past the last recorded event to the logical outcome of all the narrative interests. Thus we know everything that we care to know as soon as we have finished the great culmination. The climax and the dénouement are one. In any kind of ending, however, the beginner's chief problem is to stop soon enough. He must not tell his readers anything that they will inevitably discover for themselves; he must really stop as soon as he has told his story.

Another difficult matter in gaining effectiveness in fictional narrative is the handling of conversation. We have seen that conversation ought to perform a twofold function; that is, it should contribute to the action of the story and it should serve as a means of characterization. Now in order to perform this function most faithfully, not only must it in itself seem to be the infinitely various conversation of daily life, but the explanatory comment that accompanies it must support it unobtrusively; the framework must not attract unnecessary attention. As examples, compare the two short passages that follow. In the first, note the unnecessary repetition of "said" and "replied"; in the second, note the better effect produced by the variety, as well as by the color, in the descriptive explanatory verbs. Note, too, in the second example, that these words are introduced in different ways.

"I don't see how that is going to help matters," Uncle Jim said.

"But you see," replied Charley, "if I can go to college it will not be difficult for me to help myself."

"Pooh, pooh!" said Uncle Jim; "a college education isn't worth getting nowadays."

"Well, you just try me, then see what you have to say," said Charley confidently.

"I lost ten thousand dollars in dry oil wells, and I guess I'm not ready to take any more risks," Uncle Jim replied.

"Yes, but the last one made up for all the rest," replied Charley.

"Don't become too importunate," said Uncle Jim.[1]

"You won't care to hear about it," I said, wavering. "Besides, I can't explain exactly. I think I won't tell you." But all the time I knew I should have to.

"But I *do* care," she wailed plaintively. "I didn't think you'd be so unkind!"

This would never do. That little downward tug at either corner of the mouth — I knew the symptom only too well!

"It's like this," I began stammeringly. "This bit of road here — up as far as that corner — you know it's a horrid dull bit of road. I'm always having to go up and down it, and I know it so well, and I'm so sick of it. So whenever I get to that corner, I just — well, I go right off to another place!"

"What sort of a place?" she asked, looking round her gravely.

"Of course it's just a place I imagine," I went on hurriedly and rather shamefacedly: "but it's an awfully nice place — the nicest place you ever saw. And I always go off there in church, or during joggraphy lessons."

"I'm sure it's not nicer than my home," she cried patriotically. "Oh, you ought to see my home — it's lovely! We've got —"

"Yes it is, ever so much nicer," I interrupted. "I mean" — I went on apologetically — "of course I know your home's beautiful and all that. But this *must* be nicer, 'cos if you want anything at all, you've only *got* to want it, and you can have it!"

"That sounds jolly," she murmured. "Tell me more about it, please. Tell me how you get there, first."[2]

No one should be content to use a mere half dozen explanatory or descriptive verbs. In a moment we can recall a score or more, such as *replied, responded, answered, rejoined, retorted, affirmed, asserted, maintained, assured, protested, demanded, declared, snarled, pleaded, entreated, insisted, blurted, murmured, cried, ejaculated, exclaimed, whispered, roared, hissed, screamed, snapped;* and a few minutes of thought would increase this list materially. These words represent distinctions in meaning that cannot be suggested if only two or three of them are used to explain all possible turns in dialogue. They set the conversation free.

[1] From a student's theme.

[2] Kenneth Grahame, Mutabile Semper, in *Dream Days*. John Lane Company.

Effectiveness is always increased, too, by simplicity. Frank Norris expressed the matter admirably: "Elaborate phrase, rhetoric, the intimacy of metaphor and allegory and simile is forgivable for the unimportant episodes where the interest of the narrative is languid; where we are willing to watch the author's ingenuity in the matter of scrolls and fretwork and mosaics-rococo work. But when the catastrophe comes, when the narrative swings clear upon its pivot and we are lifted with it from out the world of our surroundings, we want to forget the author. We want no adjectives to blur our substantives. The substantives may now speak for themselves. We want no metaphor, no simile to make clear the matter. If at this moment of drama and intensity the matter is not of itself preëminently clear, no verbiage, however ingenious, will clarify it. Heighten the effect. Does exclamation and heroics on the part of the bystanders ever make the curbstone drama more poignant? Who would care to see Niagara through colored fire and calcium lights?" [1]

The effect of simplicity, however, does not stop with the clearer image that is presented to the reader; it goes far in bringing the reader into sympathy with the writer's point of view. Every writer, of course, colors his story with his own individuality. Nevertheless, he cannot assume an attitude that calls his human sympathy into question. Every concrete detail that he selects must reflect what we rather vaguely call his humanity. There must be everywhere a spirit of large-hearted honesty and sincerity. If, therefore, he speaks straightforwardly and simply, as sincere persons usually speak, he does not give the impression that he is trying to do a clever literary trick, but that he is anxious to say something which he believes is thoroughly worth saying and which he really wants to communicate to everyone who will read.

Perhaps a word should be said about effectiveness in the drama. Since the drama is only a modified or restricted

[1] *The Responsibilities of the Novelist*, pp. 244 f. Doubleday, Page and Company.

form of narration, it is measured by standards which in many cases are very different from those employed in determining the merit of the novel or the short story. The play, it should be remembered, though it may make interesting reading, is designed for acting; and the limitations imposed by its presentation on the stage serve to bring out clearly the differences between it and the novel. In the first place, the playwright reaches his audience indirectly. The novelist usually accompanies his reader throughout the story and makes whatever explanation may be necessary. If he wishes to characterize one of his personages by describing him, he may do so with propriety, and, if he is skillful, with effectiveness. The playwright, on the other hand, must make all necessary explanations through the persons in the play, and he must portray character solely through indirect means. Moreover, instant and absolute clearness is demanded. The persons who constitute the audience cannot turn back a few pages to catch up a thread of the story which they have missed, as they can do in reading. The scenes, therefore, and the transitions must be unmistakable. And if it is important that they keep some one event closely in mind until later events give it significance, that event must be dwelt upon, emphasized in a dozen ways, until every auditor sees it clearly and is impressed with it definitely. Furthermore, the drama calls for a much greater simplification of life than is possible in prose fiction, unless, perhaps, in a certain type of short story, inasmuch as the persons in the play must in two or three hours represent as much life as is represented in a novel of four or five hundred pages.

READINGS AND EXERCISES

1. Of course you must practice the writing of narration just as you practice in exposition, argument, or description. Write (a) a biography of some classmate; (b) a fable; (c) a history of some political intrigue with which you are familiar; (d) a ghost story; (e) a story based on some local legend; (f) a one-act play. Writing narratives is good fun if one is familiar with the material.

2. Here is Poe's opinion of the importance of knowing the end from the beginning. Try to find other opinions on the same matter.

"I cannot help thinking that romance-writers, in general, might, now and then, find their account in taking a hint from the Chinese, who in spite of building their houses downward, have still sense enough to begin their books at the end."

3. How many of the stories that you have read during the past four years are told from the point of view of the leading character?

4. You have doubtless said many times, "A story must have climax." What is climax? Is it always the result of the same cause? Examine a number of short stories and try to reach a conclusion.

5. After you have planned a story, write a biography of each one of the persons who are to appear in it. In this way you can easily learn whether you really know your characters.

6. Do you ever try to characterize the strangers you pass on the street? Do you ever learn later that you were wrong?

7. Examine the names in *Treasure Island*, *Vanity Fair*, *Oliver Twist*, and *The House of the Seven Gables*. Are they well chosen? Examine the names in other stories you have read.

8. How many men and women do you know who would make good characters in a story? What would Dickens, George Eliot, Thackeray, or Stevenson have done with them?

9. From your own experience prepare a list of places where stories ought to happen. Bring the list to class and discuss the kind of story that ought to fit into each one of the places.

10. Study the titles of stories that appear in the magazines this month. How many of them seem to be especially good? What makes them good?

11. The newspapers contain much material for stories. Save clippings for a week or two and compare them. Bringing them together will suggest many possibilities that studying them singly would not yield.

12. Carry a notebook. Jot down a few words about every interesting event, every interesting character, and every interesting place that comes to your attention during a month. How many of these seem to have narrative possibilities?

13. Have you ever examined Hawthorne's *American Notebooks?* Read them. They are refreshing miscellanies which interest almost

everyone. Find in them the beginnings of *The Great Stone Face*, *Ethan Brand*, and other stories.

14. Why is it bad art to attach a heavy moral to the end of a story? Was it regarded as bad art a hundred years ago?

15. Our directions to the stranger who inquires about our street are not quite like the same kind of directions in a story. Did you ever try to learn what makes this difference? How does the matter-of-fact spirit differ from the idealistic spirit?

16. Did you ever try to classify the leading magazines of the day according to the type of story they publish? Prepare a report of your findings.

17. Below are some references which deal especially with the technique of story-writing:

E. M. Albright: *The Short Story.*
C. R. Barrett: *Short Story Writing.*
Walter Besant: *The Art of Fiction.*
J. B. Esenwein: *Writing the Short Story.*
Clayton Hamilton: *The Materials and Methods of Fiction.*
C. F. Horne: *The Technique of the Novel.*
Henry James: *The Art of Fiction.*
C. L. Maxcy: *The Rhetorical Principles of Narration.*
Bliss Perry: *A Study of Prose Fiction.*
R. L. Stevenson: *A Gossip on Romance.*
A Humble Remonstrance.
J. R. Taylor: *Composition in Narration.*

18. Read the *Life of Alice Freeman Palmer*, by George Herbert Palmer. It illustrates almost perfectly the happy balancing of devotion and restraint that results in fine art. It scarcely need be added that it is a singularly interesting biography of one of the most beautiful characters in the history of education.

19. The short story affords a good opportunity to study many of the problems of narration. The following list includes a variety of material and treatment:

T. B. Aldrich: *Goliath.*
Marjorie Daw.
H. de Balzac: *A Passion in the Desert.*
The Atheist's Mass.
La Grande Bretèche.
The Unknown Masterpiece.
Bible: *The Story of Bel and the Dragon.*

The Story of Judith.
The Story of Naaman's Healing.
The Story of Ruth.
G. W. Cable: *Posson Jone'.*
'Sieur George.
Joseph Conrad: *Amy Foster.*
Falk.
To-Morrow.
S. R. Crockett: *Accepted of the Beasts.*
Alphonse Daudet: *Master Corneille's Secret.*
The Death of the Dauphin.
Charles Dickens: *The Cricket on the Hearth.*
M. W. Freeman: *A Church Mouse.*
A New England Nun.
A Village Singer.
Calla Lilies and Hannah.
The Revolt of "Mother."
Hamlin Garland: *Among the Corn Rows.*
The Return of a Private.
Up the Coolly.
E. E. Hale: *My Double and How he Undid Me.*
The Man Without a Country.
Bret Harte: *Tennessee's Partner.*
The Luck of Roaring Camp.
The Outcasts of Poker Flat.
The Iliad of Sandy Bar.
Nathaniel Hawthorne: *The Ambitious Guest.*
The Wives of the Dead.
Ethan Brand.
W. W. Jacobs: *A Change of Treatment.*
A Love Passage.
An Elaborate Elopement.
S. O. Jewett: *A Winter Courtship.*
Fame's Little Day.
Rudyard Kipling: *.007.*
The Brushwood Boy.
The Courting of Dinah Shadd.
The Man Who Would be King.
The Phantom Rickshaw.
The Return of Imray's Ghost.
The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes.
Without Benefit of Clergy.
Charles Lamb: *The Superannuated Man.*

Guy de Maupassant: *A Coward.*
Moonlight.
La Mère Sauvage.
The Necklace.
A Piece of String.
Prosper Mérimée: *Mateo Falcone.*
The Taking of the Redoubt.
O. Henry (Sydney Porter): *The Four Million* (The Volume)
or *The Trimmed Lamp* (The Volume).
A. T. Quiller-Couch: *A Pair of Hands.*
E. A. Poe: *Berenice.*
Ligeia.
The Cask of Amontillado.
The Fall of the House of Usher.
The Masque of the Red Death.
The Tell-Tale Heart.
R. L. Stevenson: *A Lodging for the Night.*
Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.
Markheim.
The Merry Men.
Will 'o the Mill.
Count Leo Tolstoy: *A Prisoner in the Caucasus.*
Master and Man.
Two Old Men.
What Men Live By.
Henry Van Dyke: *The Blue Flower.*
The Story of the Other Wise Man.

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